

Employee Engagement in the Goal Setting Process:
Can employee engagement theory improve the goal setting process?

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the



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by Mitchell Brooks Robertson

Student ID University of Liverpool: H00028794

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Declaration

No part of this work has been submitted in support of an application for degree or qualification of this or any other University or Institution of learning.

Abstract

This thesis explores how applying elements from the literature on employee engagement can improve the goal setting process within an automotive membership company. The employee engagement literature has a great deal of research that suggests that employees who report high engagement also have a high level of performance. The purpose of this research was to explore whether incorporating variables of engagement within goal setting conversations could create a better experience for the employee. Using an Action Research approach, I expanded my understanding of a workplace problem beyond my experience and use an evidenced-based level of knowledge. I followed the Action Research Cycle to identify themes in the literature, change my organization's goal setting process using variables for engagement from the literature, inquired about the employee experience of the goal setting conversation in pre and post interviews, and To analyze the results, I organized participant interview responses and goal setting document contents into themes, considered how they supported or deviated from the literature, and discussed how I reviewed the goal setting documentation. The findings suggested that using engagement principles, such as employee feedback, work environment, and development can improve the goal setting process for employees, as well as increase the parity between individual and organizational goals. Possible improvements to the redesigned process are to capture and understand participants' feelings during the process, improve supervisor buy-in before the process introducing to employees, and to simplify the goals setting process further to a minimally viable process with the most significant impact. I recommend future research to measure the impact of an engagement-based goal setting process on performance and to explore how to use employee engagement theory to improve other business processes.

Keywords: Employee engagement, work engagement, goal setting, performance feedback, employee development, work environment, promotions, organizational alignment.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

Doctorate of Business Administration (DBA)

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

Attend, Imagine, and Move – Decision-making approach (AIM)

Action Research (AR)

Action Research Cycle (AR cycle)

Employee engagement (engagement)

Balanced Score Card (BSC)

Management By Objectives (MBO)

Total Quality Management (TQM)

Board of Directors (Board)

Clarity, Atmosphere, and Talent – Work environment assessment (CAT)

1. Introduction to this Thesis

1.1 Introduction

This thesis research project directly addresses the specific business problem of employees setting vague and incomplete goals that were not measurable and lacked expected outcomes or deadlines. The purpose of this research was to explore whether incorporating variables of engagement within goal setting conversations could create a better experience for the employee. To answer the research question of how the employee engagement literature can improve the goal setting process and how employee experience that process, I used knowledge from engagement theory to enhance the goal setting process, the goals of employee and, hopefully in the long-term, the performance of the organization.

1.2 Initial Research Interest

The overarching issue that I explored in this research project is that our organization's employees were not increasing their performance more than in small increments year-over-year, and they were not aware of the expectations of their performance. The organization had only seen 1% to 2% growth over the past 12 years; our peer organizations performance grew 4% to 6%. As I considered our organization's problem, reflected on recent training and continuing education I have taken, one of the hot topics of the time came to mind, employee engagement. In one of the sessions I attended at a conference, the speaker shared a video 'Employee Engagement – Who's Sinking Your Boat?' by Bob Kelleher (2013), where they boast that "highly

engaged employees are 480% more committed to helping their company succeed” by “unlocking employee potential to drive high performance.” My initial curiosity of employee engagement led me to ask myself the question of what we could use to increase employee engagement in our organization. Although there were many types of training and conference sessions about what employee engagement can do, I was not satisfied with what I learned about specifically how to create employee engagement. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, I used the body of knowledge to explore what employee engagement was, how I could develop it in my organization and what was a method to understand how each employee could be engaged. Eventually, reflecting on the literature, I decided to focus on how to use employee engagement theory to improve the goal setting process by inviting each employee to share how they would like to engage the organization’s work through their goals, thereby also agreeing on that employee’s performance expectations.

1.3 Research Background

For the past four years, I have been exploring workplace problems based on employee performance. In the two organizations where I worked during my Doctorate of Business Administration (DBA) journey, we struggled to increase the performance of our employees. In my modules, I wrestled with the problem of the lack of employee accountability, development and planning being the leading reason for our organization’s financial distress. Throughout my DBA studies, I reviewed the literature and engaged my learning set in several different ways around this problem. In those modules, I questioned how supervisor-provided feedback clearly

stated development goals, clear performance expectations, alignment of employee goals with organizational goals in the strategic planning process, employee engagement, and compensation could impact employee performance.

While on my DBA journey, I wanted to learn how to develop a method to cultivate and support highly committed and engaged employees to create a high performing organization. This idea informed my research interests. I started to focus on the relationship between employee engagement and performance. Looking at that relationship, with the intended outcome to improve organizational performance, I began to understand how employees' goals could impact organizational goals, and further, how employee engagement could impact individual goal setting.

At the end of module 4, I started employment at the second organization during my DBA journey. In this thesis, I will call my organization the Automobile Club, or Auto Club. During this research project, Auto Club merged with a larger automobile club that shared the same business model, products, and services. The new organization doubled in geographical size in the United States. The end-state organization spread across seven states of the United States, has over 4,000 employees, provides products and services to over 5.7 million club members, has over \$3.8 billion in sales, and \$900 million in top-line revenue, (New Organization 2017 Financials).

Although the region of Auto Club where I completed my research is now a smaller company within the larger organization described above, during my research we acted as an independent organization. At the time of action research cycles of this project, my organization had 95 employees, provided services to over 200,000 members, completed \$58 million in sales,

and \$17 million in top-line revenue (Auto Club 2015 Financials). The divisions within Auto Club included sales, member services, human resources, and marketing. The organization had four levels of employees: front-line staff, location supervisors, department supervisors, and a CEO. The CEO asked me to develop a new goal setting process for Auto Club before this thesis. We introduced the goal setting process to multiple locations, across six organizational divisions and to four levels of Auto Club. For this research project, I focused on redesigning the new goals setting process because the initial process did not meet its intended outcomes.

Before the merger in 2012, Auto Club hired a new CEO because of over a decade of limited growth in clientele and/or revenues. In 2014, Auto Club was ranked 48 out of 55 when evaluated against organizations that sold the same or similar products in North America. As shared above, our organization had only seen 1% to 2% growth over the past 12 years; our peers' performance grew 4% to 6%. The new president changed the executive team, brand, and culture to transform the organization. After my appointment as Vice President, the CEO asked me to focus on the performance of our employees to help improve our rankings. To carry out this objective, it was imperative to the success of the organization that our people improve their performance. The CEO and I discussed the issue of employee performance, and we agreed that the primary problem was employees setting vague and incomplete goals, if any at all, that were not measurable and lacked expected outcomes or deadlines; and as a result, we could not measure employee performance.

For context, our organization focused on five areas for annual goals: growth (increase product users/members), sales (revenue), operational (budgets), financial (profit and loss) and

quality (member satisfaction). As a supervisor and the executive accountable for the Human Resources department, I had access to all the organization's performance data, employee records, and operational policies. This information was useful to diagnose the history of our organization's performance. To research our employees' past performance and our history of setting goals, I reviewed past financial documents, performance reports, performance reviews, and employee engagement surveys. Additionally, I discussed the history and method of the performance management process with the CEO, supervisors, and employees.

In the past, all employees took part in an annual evaluation conversation, including a potential merit pay increase, based on twelve values of the organization found in a value-based review. To complete this process, which had been in place for over ten years, an employee responded with his/her thoughts on the twelve values using an online tool and held a discussion with the supervisor about the degree to which the employee's performance aligned to the values. The conversation culminated in both parties agreeing on a final rating using a 5-point scale. Employees were given 2-4% base compensation increase depending on the outcome of the evaluation. During this process, if supervisors assigned goals, they were in support of the values rather than the five areas of focus for the organization (growth, performance, operational, financial, and quality). The goals were set in the context of the values stated in the performance reviews of the organization. Examples of the values were such terms as effective communication, community citizenship, and apparent ability to uphold the values of the organization.

I compared the values found in the performance reviews with the proforma and organizational financial goals, and I recognized that one issue with the values-based

performance management approach was that the values did not reflect the organization's performance goals. One could argue that the values could indirectly lead to organizational performance, but they were vague and subjective regarding measurable performance results. Therefore, it was not possible to use the values to enhance workplace performance (Grant, 2012). Instead, the values were chosen by a past senior leadership team. These values goals were disconnected from the performance goals, and no matrices existed for measuring the employees' roles in achieving those goals. For example, if an employee had outstanding community citizenship, that effort was not likely to result in enough sales to help him, or her meet their monthly sales expectations. An employee would actively pursue activities to meet his or her performance review expectations, but those activities would take time for other efforts that could more directly help them meet their sales goals. For example, outbound calling, quote writing or follow up calls compared to volunteering at the food bank.

The disconnect was that if all the employees met their annual review expectations, the organization could still fall short of its performance goals. Moreover, our employees were not aware of their own goals or the expectations of their performance from the organization. Supervisors were not sharing the goals of the organization with the employee, and the supervisors were not telling what performance expectations they had for each employee. The issue was with the communication and resulting lacking awareness of goals.

Once a year, the sales directors gathered together with the controller and CEO to discuss revenue targets for the organization in the following year. During that meeting, the CEO would share his vision of the organization's performance for the year, and the sales directors calculated

how much in sales needed to achieve that goal, at both the organizational and individual levels. The sales goals for each agent were based on his/her location, experience as a salesperson, past sales performance, and the supervisor's personal evaluation of what that employee can sell the following year.

After the annual planning discussion defined above, I learned that directors did not communicate the agent's goals to the agents. In other words, the salespersons did not know how much they needed to sell during that year to meet the overall goals of the organization. Instead, sales directors would coach the agent to improve his or her sales results throughout the year, regardless of how well they were performing. When I asked one sales director to explain his approach, the rationale was that: "If the employee knew their performance expectations, they would stop selling after they met that goal." An assumption was that they would sell more if they did not know their supervisor's expectation. Our Vice President of Sales shared, "It's like a race: when they cross the finish line, they stop running." He believed it was better always to coach them to sell more than to share what sales they needed to meet the overall organizational sales goal collectively. He said that he expected the sales directors to use that same approach with the sales agents who reported to them. This approach causes an issue; if an employee does not know their goals, they will not have a measurement to gauge their progress and have limited context to understand feedback. There is also the chance that supervisors will continually push employees to keep achieving more without a threshold of success. To address these issues, the CEO hired consultants to help us broaden the conversations about employee goals beyond sales goals.

1.4 Goal Setting Process Context - Pre-Thesis Work

Our leadership team created a goal setting process with consultants. The team also aligned the individual goals with the goals of Auto Club. These consultants helped our team develop a set of culture tools to help us create a deliberate culture in our organization. To develop the goal setting process, we relied heavily on the experience and advice from our consultants. The benefit of this method was that we were able to leverage the experience of the consultants to develop the process quickly.

We decided as a leadership team, with input from consultants, to create a new goal setting process rather than improving the earlier values-based approach. We agreed that the previous value-based performance reviews did not support the intention to increase performance in the organization. The new goal setting process would consist of a four-page conversation form featuring questions to act as a script and a one-page employee scorecard to complete the conversation. The document, we hoped, would help create a conversation between the supervisor and the employee to give feedback for the last performance period and then define objectives and set goals for the following performance period.

The goal setting conversation is based on a culture tool, an organizational model called AIM: Attend, Imagine, and Move. AIM is the process that our organization adopted to align how they made decisions across the organization, including setting employee goals. Table 1 describes

the outline of the goal setting conversation between the employee and their supervisor. In the context of goals setting, *Attend* deals with the supervisor and employee reflecting on the past; *Imagine* involves discussing what is possible, and *Move* requires committing to action. In the following table is the organization’s cultural language to describe the AIM process.

Table 1 Goal Setting Session by Section and Content (Conversation Sheets Four Page Script/Form)
<p>Attend - <i>Examine current realities regarding contribution to the organization, team, and self-development.</i></p> <p>Review accomplishments from last quarter, analyze and reflect on the outcomes.</p>
<p>Imagine - <i>Brainstorm to identify tangible goals and objectives for the next three to six months.</i></p> <p>Discuss the goals of the organization, personal goals, and how the team member wants to contribute.</p>
<p>Move - <i>Build or Review/Revise Contribution Roadmap</i></p>
<p>Scorecard - <i>Identify the results and behaviors you want to achieve</i></p>
<p>Supervisor Agreements - <i>What can your supervisor do to support your goals?</i></p>

1.4.1 Supervisor Training

To put the new goal setting sessions into practice, we held a two-day leadership-training workshop to teach all our supervisors how to transition from the value-based performance

system to the new goal setting discussions. During this off-site training, I worked with the consultants who were contracted facilitators who had experience in change management and performance enhancement. All 20 of our managers and four representatives from the human resources team attended this training, along with our CEO and me.

These managers, including regional supervisors, attended this training, where they learned about the experiences that informed the design, the steps of the process, how to fill out the forms, and how to lead the conversations. The supervisors also used role-play to practice the conversations and received constructive feedback from their peers. I presented the training with the help of the consultants. The supervisor left with several resources, including a training deck (PowerPoint), completed conversation sheets and scorecards (paper documents) from their role-play exercise and the necessary digital tools.

1.4.2 Goal Setting Sessions

The supervisors held one-on-one sessions with their employees, at their locations, in a private setting over the following month. The supervisors used the conversation sheets and scorecards as said above. When a conversation was completed, the supervisor gave a copy of the conversation sheet and scorecard to the employee and sent a digital copy to the human resources department. Managers encouraged employees to display their scorecards at their desks to be transparent and give support to each other and build a team atmosphere. In this

initial rollout, all 93 employees completed their goal setting sessions with their supervisors and completed scorecards.

1.5 Initial Goal Setting Process Assessment

To assess the goal setting session, I used the conversation sheets and scorecards. I read the documents thoroughly to gain an overall understanding of the conversation sheets and scorecards and the content within, while I made notes on what information was missing. Similarly, when I reviewed the scorecards, I gained full awareness of the data collected, looked for what was missing, and looked for details in the goals. On the final review, I put the scorecards on a single digital canvas, organized them into department and location, then I used a calculator to add up the goals for each employee. I reviewed the digital canvas and was surprised to see that the sum of the employees' sales goals did not add up to the organization's sales goals. In fact, the sum of the employees' goals only added up to 66% of the organization's sales goals. I had always assumed that supervisors took their sales goals and divided the sum out to each of their employees; however, this was not the case. For example, the organization's goal was to sell \$20 million of a product, but when I added up the sales agents for that product, they only committed to selling \$13.2 million, which means \$6.8 million in sales were not claimed by anyone.

I also attended a new hire orientation, where we shared and explained the goal setting process to new employees. We used the culture tools, some listed above, within the goal setting

process. However, the tools were not explicitly present in the directions and in some cases, there was no way to know which question should use which tool. Therefore, there was a disconnect between the cultural tools we used to communicate and the goal setting process, which made the process confusing and underdeveloped. The tools were introduced during employee orientation and the questions from the goal setting forms referenced the tools, but they were not explicitly present during the goal setting conversations. As I looked deeper into why employees did not collectively set their goals high enough to achieve the organizational goals, my research project became clear. The organizational goals setting process did not fulfill its primary function: to set individual goals that added up to meet or exceed the organization's goals.

1.6 Goal Setting and Engagement

In the past 20 years the body of knowledge about 'employee engagement' (hereafter called 'engagement'), has seen an increased interest from the research field. The literature suggests that employee performance can be improved because of engagement (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Chang, 2006; Luthans & Peterson, 2002; Rich et al., 2010; Saks, 2006; Saks & Gruman, 2011; Smythe, 2008; Tritch, 2003; Wilson, 2012). Individuals make up organizations, and because we know that personal engagement can lead to improved performance, it is reasonable to believe that increased engagement will result in increased performance for our organization. For this research project, I will acknowledge that literature supports the concept

that engagement improves the performance of an organization. Furthermore, of the twelve questions asked by the Gallup organization when measuring engagement, four of them focus on goal setting (Tritch, 2003). In addition, several studies reveal that effective goal-setting processes affect an employee's performance (Latham & Yukl, 1975; Matsui et al., 1987; Tubbs, 1986; Knight et al., 2001; Dweck et al., 1993; Sujan et al., 1994). Research, therefore, suggest that goal setting can be considered a mechanism for supervisors to improve the level of their employees' engagement (Medlin & Green, 2008), which in turn may raise performance. Goal setting models like Balance Score Card, Top Quality Management, and Management by Objectives all have focused on goal setting to meet the organizational goals, but they do not necessarily use engagement theory to support the goal setting process. With that in mind, I would like to look deeper into how I can integrate engagement theory into a process to improve goal setting. This project aims to improve our goal setting process, using engagement theory, as a method, and in the long term, to improve the individuals of our organization's performance, thereby improving organizational performance. However, the measurement of performance improvement is out of the scope and timeframe of this project.

1.7 Problem Statement

We leveraged the experience of the consultants to create a goal setting process, but it did not work. Moreover, the specific business problem was that the goals set by employees were vague and incomplete. Goals were not measurable and lacked the details to understand

expected outcomes or deadlines. I wanted to see how using knowledge from engagement theory could improve the goal setting process, the goals of employee and, long-term, the performance of the organization. The goal of this research project is to take the first step and use engagement literature to improve our goal setting process.

Research Question: How can the employee engagement literature improve the goal setting process and how employees experience that process?

Sub-questions:

- How is engagement defined in the literature?
- What are the variables of engagement?
- Can the variables of engagement integrate with a goal setting process?
- How would the employees respond to a goal setting process constructed with variables of engagement?
- How will employees respond if they have more of a say during the goal setting process?

Through an Action Research Cycle (AR Cycle), I researched the literature, changed the process, changed the employee experience and reflected on potential next steps. I hoped that the revised process would lead to a better goal setting experience for the employee, better goals as an outcome of this project. In the long term, I am interested in exploring other ways to increase employee engagement and increase performance.

In this chapter, I shared the background and development of this thesis. In chapter two, I am going to explore engagement literature and identify the variables of engagement used to improve the goal setting process. Next, in chapter three, I describe the Action Research

methodology I used in this project. Chapter four shares the details on how I used the Action Research Cycle to improve our goal setting documents, training, and process. My results are shared in chapter five, followed by a conclusion, discussion, and reflections in chapter six.

2. Literature Review

Goal setting has a long history in performance management (Ivancevich et al., 1978; Muczyk & Reimann, 1989; Odiorne, 1978; Walton, 1986; Zabaracki, 1998), and has previously been researched in relation to management processes and systems, such as continuous improvement initiatives and management by objectives. The connection of goal setting to engagement, however, is more recent, although, some studies have described a positive correlation between them (Medlin & Green, 2009).

What follows in this chapter is a review of research that looks to explore this relationship in depth, the primary purpose of which is to analyze existing knowledge that might shape this action research project. Therefore, in this review, I aimed to evaluate the critical points of engagement, the variables of engagement, and the goal setting process. A great deal of research suggests that employees who report high engagement also have a high level of performance. Therefore, my research focuses on integrating the engagement literature into the goal setting process. For that reason, this chapter continues by identifying concepts of engagement in how they are defined. After that, I move on to naming the variables of engagement from the literature, before discussing how the employee's goal setting process can influence engagement. Going deeper into improving goal setting, I looked within the scope of performance management, because I intended to replace our current performance management system with a goal setting process.

In keeping with my methodological approach (discussed in Chapter 3) my method to this research project is through an Action Research Cycle. I will use Anderson et al.'s (2015) work to explain my approach using AR. The AR cycle includes: diagnose and plan, actions, observations, reflections, revise and reset before looping to the next cycle (Anderson et al., 2015). I used the AR cycle to evaluate the goal setting process designed by consultants. A literature review focused on engagement theory, performance management, and goal setting revealed insights used to improve the goal setting process and to ask the participants how they experienced the process. Thus, when I evaluate the literature of engagement, it will be through the lens that our goal setting process can change and change again by returning to the literature to gain a deeper understanding of how to affect the process. Using abductive reasoning (Anderson et al., 2015), I was able to look at the contrasts in the goal setting process and the data while working between the two to make sense of what is happening. As shown in this chapter, variables of engagement can improve the employee's goal setting process. Variables of engagement are activities, resources or other things that lead to engagement based on the literature.

2.1 Employee Engagement

The birth and development of engagement theory started as an exploration into the psychological meaningfulness of employees' work, and the relationship between the organization and its employees (Kahn, 1990). Engagement increases when employees can work on complex problems in an environment where their roles, at least in part, are challenging,

varied, clearly delineated, creative and autonomous (Kahn, 1990). I explored the definitions that research offers about engagement to find what key concepts emerge and can inform this research project. Although developing a method to measure the outcomes of engagement is outside the scope of this research project, I will use the literature to find ways to improve the employee's experience of the goal setting process.

2.1.1 Employee Engagement Concepts

Engagement is defined in many ways in the literature, but as Saks & Gruman (2014) said, one has not been recognized as the ultimate definition of engagement. It is not clear where the term Employee Engagement originated, but it was most likely the Gallup organization in the 1990s (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). In the literature, the phrases "work engagement" and "employee engagement" are used interchangeably, with work engagement focusing on the relationship of the employee with their work and employee engagement also including the employee's relationship with the organization (Bakker & Leiter, 2010, p 10). Work engagement includes connotations such as energy, focused effort, absorption, enthusiasm, passion, commitment, and involvement from the individual (Bakker & Leiter, 2010) whereas employee engagement includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral associations with both the individual and organization (Wollard & Shuck, 2011), demonstrating that work engagement fits within employee engagement. Therefore, in this literature review, as many authors of employee engagement have done before me, I will include articles that discuss work engagement and

employee engagement to get an overview of the overall concept of engagement. Therefore, I explored a sample of definitions to see if any shared concepts emerged between the two. Many of the definitions deal with how the employee feels about their work and their work environment, authors such as, Christian et al. (2011), Kahn (1990), Macey et al. (2009), Saks & Gruman (2014), Mone et al. (2011), Schaufeli et al. (2002), and Crawford, LePine, and Rich (2010), to name a few. These authors give context to their research by characterizing the employee's emotions to describe them. Schaufeli et al. (2002) use words such as absorption, vigor, and dedication to articulate what an employee feels about their work.

Referring again to Kahn (1990), we see a connection between engagement and an employee's ability to perform their job well, connect with their colleagues effectively, and align part of his identity with their responsibilities and the organization's goals. He argues that:

Personal engagement [found in the scope of employee engagement] is the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's "preferred self" in task behaviors that promote connections to work and others, personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional), and active, full role performances...People who are personally engaged keep themselves in a role, without sacrificing one for the other (Kahn, 1990, p. 700).

Here, Kahn looks at the more profound experience of engaged employees and reveals several concepts. One concept is that employees show expression in their task behaviors and others within the organization. Employees can express themselves out of a sense of intrinsic motivation, mindfulness about and interest in their work, which results in being more productive (Kahn, 1990). Expressions of engagement are seen through ethical behaviors,

playfulness, non-defensive communication, authenticity, emotional expression, the use of personal voice, and creativity (Kahn, 1990). Furthermore, employees are willing personally to engage in their work without sacrificing self-expression: what they think or feel and their connection to others (Kahn, 1990).

Other authors offer another perspective on these concepts in their research. "In fact, if there is one common component across all definitions of engagement, it is the notion of being absorbed in one's work and role" (Saks & Gruman, 2014, p. 164). Here, being absorbed in work primarily involves an employee's emotional investment in their work. Schaufeli et al. (2002) explore the notion that an employee's ability to engage emotionally relates to their overall well-being, and argues that "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (p. 74). When they say "vigor," the authors mean "high activation;" when they say "dedication," they mean "high identification" and "absorption" means to be "fully concentrated and deeply engrossed" (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). The idea of activation is where an employee is on the continuum between exhaustion and vigor (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Similarly, identification is the continuum between cynicism and dedication (Schaufeli et al., 2002). These words paint a vivid picture of what it looks like to be engaged in one's work, as opposed to a teacher who tells a student to learn to write using a worksheet rather than investing the time to explain to a student the purpose and risk of prepositional phrases. The definition offered by Schaufeli's et al. (2002) and used again by Bakker and Bal (2010), describes the emotions of the engaged employees as being confident about the work and feeling fulfilled as a result. Those emotions produce "vigor, dedication, and

absorption.” In these, the concept of engagement is an employee making an emotional investment in their work.

Building on the idea of being engaged emotionally in one's work, Mone & London (2009) defines “an engaged employee as someone who feels involved, committed, passionate, and empowered and demonstrates those feelings in work behavior” (as cited in Mone et al., 2011, p. 206). Here, the authors reference Macey et al. (2009) to explain their terms, essentially describing the engaged employee as one who is “absorbed” in their work. In other words, Macey et al. (2009), share that an engaged team of employees will be more productive because they will give more of what they have to offer the organization. Macey et al. (2009) defined “engagement [as] an individual’s sense of purpose and focused energy, evident to others in the display of personal initiative, adaptability, effort, and persistence directed toward organizational goals” (p.7). The authors explain this in their employee engagement value chain, arguing that engagement-oriented feelings lead to engagement-oriented behaviors: urgency, focus, intensity, and enthusiasm. In both Mone et al. (2011) and Macey et al. (2009), the authors share how engagement is a result of an employee feeling energized and competent in their work. Like Seijts & Crim’s (2006) definition: “An engaged employee is a person who is fully involved in, and enthusiastic about, his or her work” (p.1). They also offer a variety of statements they believe would an engaged employee might say: “I want to do this,” “I am dedicated to the success of what I am doing,” or “I love what I am doing” (Seijts & Crim, 2006, p. 1). Here, employees prove their emotional investment by using words like enthusiastic, dedicated, and love to describe their actions and how they belong to an organization.

These feelings are used as a platform to describe a conceptual approach using *The Ten C's of Employee Engagement* to teach leaders how to engage the employee's "heads, hearts, and hands" (Seijts & Crim, 2006, p.3). They use the ten C's to describe what a manager can do or discuss to enhance the employee's work environment to inspire engagement. The ten C's are *connect, career, clarity, convey, congratulate, contribute, control, collaborate, credibility, and confidence* (Seijts & Crim, 2006). According to Seijts & Crim, these avenues for action provide a framework through which leaders can help create an engaging environment for their employees.

Building on the idea that organizations need to create the right work environment for employees to be engaged, Maslach & Leiter (1997) defines engagement as "an energetic state of involvement with personally fulfilling activities that enhance one's sense of professional efficacy" (p. 498). The authors focus on reducing the impact of burnout, and they share how to stop burnout by correcting gaps in workload, distributing control, offering a reward, cultivating community, establishing fairness and minimizing value conflicts. Further, they tell that an employee's professional efficacy can be enhanced when he or she feels fulfilled and that the quality of their work activities and the overall working environment contribute to this sense of fulfillment. Here, the authors are making a case that it is not solely up to the employee to be engaged; organizations must also manage the work environments for employees to stay engaged.

Returning to Seijts & Crim (2006), who argue that performance is not just limited to the employee's role; employees have the power to change the organization. They argue that

“[e]ngaged employees care about the future of the company and are willing to...exceed...duty’s call...to see that the organization succeeds” (Seijts & Crim, 2006, p.1). Employees can affect the organization, but the organization must try to retain top talent by providing a work environment and promotional opportunities that inspire an emotional connection to the organization and cognitive vigilance (Seijts & Crim, 2006). In this, Seijts & Crim (2006) share the concept that an employee wants to make a difference to the organization and themselves.

A review of these definitions has revealed many concepts that I can use to improve the employee’s experience in the goal setting process. In the definitions of engagement, there is a premise that an organization needs to set the stage for an employee to invest themselves emotionally in their work. The employee’s emotional investment, work environment, and ability to make a difference can impact their engagement, which I will explore more in the next section and discuss the practical implications in chapter four. Organizing the literature into these themes, I used them in this research project to explore how to set the stage for a goal setting process.

2.1.2 Research and the Variables for Employee Engagement

Many researchers, as shared in this section, have gone beyond merely defining engagement and have explored how to engage their employees in their work and what environment allows engagement to flourish. Additionally, researchers examine practical steps that result in engagement, which I have called variables of engagement, following the example

of Saks (2006). In this section, I look for more in-depth research in how to build on the employee's emotional investment, work environment, and how their ability to make a difference can all be used to impact their engagement.

An employee's emotional investment to their work primarily involves *how* they work. Christian et al. (2011) suggest that factors impacting engagement include the availability of quality feedback, tasks significance, and a variety of tasks, autonomy in completing work and opportunities to problem solve. These factors can be used by an organization to positively impact engagement by giving employees the freedom to invest themselves creatively in their work, including the ability to influence *how* work is done. Beyond just finishing tasks, this involves giving a voice to the employee regarding how to improve organizational productivity and processes (Mone & London, 2010).

According to the research, employees will gauge their willingness to invest themselves in the organization based on their perception of what resources they have (Kahn, 1990; Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010). Being intrinsically motivated increases, the chances of employees investing themselves in their work and stems from their feelings that the work they do is worthwhile (Kahn, 1990; Saks & Gruman, 2014). Employees want to know that their time, work, and overall sacrifice have meaning; that their work is having a positive impact on the overall goal of the organization. An example of positive impact to the organization is the employee feels like they are contributing to the success of the organization (Crawford, 2006; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Seijts & Crim, 2006) or their input can improve the organization's performances or processes (Mone & London, 2010). An example of this would be if a trainer

suggested a new leadership curriculum design intended to help some new manager practice de-escalation techniques in their training, so they are better prepared when faced with it in their work environments. In this example, the trainer can contribute to the success of the organization and improve the leader's impact on the organization.

When employees see their work as challenging, their engagement goes up; on the other hand, when they see it as tedious, they are less engaged (Crawford, LePine & Rich, 2010). When work demands challenge an employee, it has the potential to trigger personal growth and tends to promote positive emotions, which enhance an employee's ability to cope with the challenge by increasing their effort (Crawford, LePine & Rich, 2010). In contrast, tedious work hinders personal growth and tends to promote negative emotions, which are more likely to cause an employee to feel unable to cope with the work demands. (Crawford, LePine & Rich, 2010). Employees want to have confidence that they can successfully complete their goals at work, and that they have a resourceful work environment, (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) one that gives the resources to do their job effectively (Mone & London, 2010).

Engagement deals with the idea of an employee connecting to their work, having a personal presence, and being fully active in their role, without giving one aspect up for another (Kahn, 1990). Additionally, engagement involves a high level of identification and level of energy in one's work (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011), especially meaningful and challenging work (Seijts & Crim, 2006). If an employee is genuinely engaged their investment should be much more than just labor; it has to involve something that allows self-expression. Reflecting on the definitions of engagement, this is an example of an employee being emotionally engaged.

Employees must see themselves as a part of the organization and believe that they can make a difference to gain a sense of belonging (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Belonging is not only about the work they do, and how that work contributes to the overall goal of the organization, but they must see themselves as a part of the social construct of that organization. An employee's broad and deep connection or attachment with the organization influences their willingness to help the organization succeed by going above and beyond (Gebauer, Lowman, & Gordon, 2008). Research within the scope of engagement has found that social support is positively related to engagement (Christian et al., 2011). Similarly, Pratt and Ashforth (2003) argue that engagement is driven by "whom one surrounds oneself with as part of organizational membership, and the goals, values, and beliefs that the organization espouses" (p. 314).

Employees renew or restore energy in a work environment where fairness and high levels of trust build social support networks, resiliency, and confidence as they are motivated and free fully to engage (Macey et al., 2009). Fairness comes in several different ways. One way is through tangible rewards such as training, promotions or compensation. The second deals with the procedures that are used to make decisions about rewards. Lastly, the way coworkers and supervisors display interpersonal fairness through support, warmth, and courtesy in their interactions. Interpersonal fairness suggests that fairness perceptions are likely to be a factor in developing trust and, as Macey et al., (2008) have argued, trust is a part of the foundation for engagement.

High levels of trust are essential for employees to be engaged and can be defined as the employee is believing that other employees and management will work in their favor and

protect them (Macey et al., 2008; Mone & London, 2010). The more employees encounter uncertainty and ambiguity the more trust becomes an issue, and employees are not free to fully invest themselves in their work (Macey et al., 2009). Uncertainty and ambiguity are typical in today's organizations, and employees can build social support networks in their work environments as a source of information to do their work, which also satisfies their inherent need to relate to others. These social networks are particularly crucial to personal engagement (Macey et al., 2009) since they help provide a sense of belonging to a broader community.

According to Macey et al. (2008), resiliency and confidence have a positive impact on engagement behaviors and feelings. Both can be developed using interventions that encourage thoughtful reflection and learning by inviting employees to think broadly about their experience while improving problem-solving skills (Macey et al., 2009). Confidence is a result of the employee's belief that their supervisor has integrity built from competence, fairness and upward influence which is the supervisor's ability to influence their supervisor or the organization (Macey et al., 2009). Indeed, perhaps the most influential relationship that impacts the employee's work environment is their relationship with their supervisor. After all, it is an employee's supervisor who plays a primary role in the feedback the employee receives, and feedback is positively related to engagement (Christian et al., 2011). Feedback should support individual performance as well as group performance (Matsui, Kakuyama, & Onglatco, 1987), it should be honest (Catteeuw et al., 2007) it should be offered in real-time (Bakker & Bal, 2010), and should be ongoing (Mone & London, 2010). However, not all feedback is created equal. Real-time feedback about performance with an employee's supervisor can positively impact

their engagement in the same week, but when employees receive feedback that helps them develop in their role, their supervisors can positively impact their engagement in weeks to follow (Bakker and Bal, 2010). In most cases, and within our organization, the supervisor can have the ability to significantly impact the amount of feedback, opportunities to professionally develop, and the level of work an employee is asked to do.

In both Mone et al. (2011) and Macey et al. (2009), the authors share how engagement is a result of an employee's experiences and the conditions of how their work is completed. An example of conditions is confidence that goals can successfully be completed and a resourceful work environment, both fulfill an employee's need to belong (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). In both examples, it is up to the organization to create the right work conditions for the employee to complete their work successfully. When the organization sets goals, the goals must be possible. An example would be for a school to set a goal to move the number of students who score above average from 70% to 90% with no added resources or time than prior years. Job resources are the aspects of the work that is functional in stimulating personal development and growth, reducing job demands, and assisting in achieving work goals (Crawford, LePine & Rich, 2010). Examples of job resources include social support, feedback, task variety, participation in decision-making, professional development, and job control. For a school to create a resourceful work environment, they could add teacher aids to help in the classroom to invest time with students who need more attention. These conditions create the right work environment for an employee to feel like they belong to the organization. The satisfaction of belonging can increase the work engagement of the employee (Bakker & Bal, 2010). If an

employee can see a path forward within the organization, they can gain a sense of belonging to the organization (Mone & London, 2010).

Other variables of engagement involve opportunities for career development and promotions within the organization. This is an extension of an employee's opportunity to use creativity in their work and to contribute to the success of the organization, where meaningful and challenging work designed for career advancement (Seijts & Crim, 2006), along with a clear career progression for an employee are linear predictors of engagement (Mone & London, 2010). Supervisors can drive engagement if they support an employee's career development efforts and provide sufficient training opportunities for that employee (Mone & London, 2010; Crawford, 2006).

The last variable relates to an employee's level of understanding and acceptance of the organization's vision, mission, or strategy, which is a predictor of engagement (Mone & London, 2010). Engagement increases when the employee's view of the beliefs, values, and goals of the organization or aligned with their own (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Crawford, 2006). According to Mone & London (2010), supervisors can align the employee's beliefs with the organization's beliefs when they provide feedback and set goals with them. Therefore, it is possible to train supervisors to use goal-setting session to spur employees' engagement. Moreover, this could be designed within a goal setting process. Table 3 at the end of chapter 2 provides a summary of the variables detailed above.

2.1.3 Employee Engagement Outcomes

After gaining an understanding of engagement concepts in the literature and what variables impact engagement, I wanted to understand what engagement can lead to in an organization, or in its employees. In this section, I will focus on the outcomes and effects of engagement.

Many authors claim that engagement is a driver in an organization's competitive advantage and success (Macey et al., 2009; Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010; Seijits & Crim, 2006). Rich, LePine, and Crawford (2010) contend that more research should be done to support the claims that engagement creates a competitive advantage, but they agree that employees who have high engagement also have higher levels of task performance. Likewise, Macey et al. (2009) claim that an organization's human assets that are engaged create the "ultimate competitive advantage for firms" (p. 10). Seijits & Crim (2006) agree, saying that engagement should be a priority for leaders of an organization and recommend that those leaders find reasons why employees are not fully engaged and eliminate those reasons. Other authors claim that customer satisfaction, productivity, profitability and shareholder returns increase because of engaged employees (Crawford et al. 2010; Harter et al. 2002). These authors present compelling reasons why organizations should invest in promoting engagement.

Harter et al. (2002) used meta-analysis to examine a causal relationship between employee satisfaction and engagement and business-unit outcomes including profit and productivity, as well as accidents and employee turnover. Engagement has been shown to

positively impact non-performance behaviors like lowering turnover (Bezuijen et al., 2010; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), increasing organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Saks, 2006), while improving health and wellness screening scores (Cole et al., 2012; Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010). Harter et al. (2002) believe that future work should be done to measure how short-term outcomes such as customer satisfaction and employee turnover, which are a result of employee satisfaction and engagement, can lead to positive financial outcomes.

A review of the literature about engagement outcomes provided clarity regarding the variables of engagement. There were fewer outcomes of engagement than variables, but the variety of outcomes further complicated the already expansive knowledge in engagement theory. More work could be done to figure out the relationships between the variables of engagement and their outcomes, like the work of Bakker & Demerouti (2007) to create the Structural Model with Engagement and the other Affective-Motivational States. In this work, the authors provide insights into how employee's emotional experiences in the workplace can impact their episodic performance process and suggest that proactive behavior to reduce exhaustion can positively influence engagement.

2.2 Performance Management

Since most research done about engagement suggests that increasing employee engagement correlates positively to improved organization performance, I wanted to look for the performance management tools that organizations had used and how they related to

engagement. More importantly, because of the influence that a supervisor has on an employee's engagement, I want to examine the role that the supervisor plays in the use of these tools. The purpose of performance management is to clarify job expectations, enhance productivity, develop capabilities, align desired behaviors with the goals of the organization, provide insights into decisions about employees, and to improve communication between the supervisor and the employee (Pulakos, 2004). According to Pulakos (2004), the process is broken into phases: performance planning, ongoing feedback, employee input, performance evaluation, and performance review; it can pair with a competency model that articulates the knowledge, skills, and abilities to be successful. Examples of performance management systems are in Table 2.

Table 2 Performance Management Systems	
Name	Goal
Balanced Score Card (BSC)	Operates on the notion that “if you cannot measure it, you cannot prove it” and is constructed from learning and growth, process, customer and financial perspective (Kaplan, 2010).
Management By Objectives (MBO)	A process of a supervisor working with an employee to define objectives and negotiate the goals, actions, and deadlines (Tosi, Rizzo, & Carroll, 1970).
Total Quality Management (TQM)	Comprises of everyone in the organization striving towards clearly measurable quality standards that are communicated from the top and support the vision, principles, and values of the organization (Rawlins, 2008).

By reviewing these tools, my interest is to see if engagement strategies had been used in performance management systems to address engagement. Historically, organizations have misused performance management processes, and they rarely work to achieve their purpose of increasing performance (Pulakos & O'Leary, 2011). Part of the explanation for this might be that performance management processes, including those listed above, have become overly complicated with a multitude of tools, paperwork, and steps, which become overly burdensome and therefore ineffective (Saks & Gruman, 2011). In my organization, the number of measurements, tools, and forms that can be used to evaluate performance overwhelms supervisors and employees. Consequently, they either execute the process poorly, without all required information or not at all.

Another obstacle diminishing the effectiveness of performance management systems is the full range of jobs and performance expectations in the workplace Singh (2008). There is the argument that another deficiency of traditional performance management process is that they are not designed for today's jobs, which are less routine than in the past and have many ways to define good performance (Singh, 2008). One example of how the workplace has changed is the introduction of technology, and the speed at the rate information can be gathered. It is no longer as valuable to memorize information when it can be accessed quickly from many resources. Excellent performance has moved from knowing the information for a decision to managing a massive amount of information so that it can be used to make business decisions. Technology has also changed how many people do one job in an organization. An organization no longer needs five accountants producing financial reports when one business analyst can

create an organizational scorecard. As a result, performance management systems need to be designed to accommodate many individuals doing different jobs within an organization.

An essential aspect of the performance management process, and with clear implications for engagement, is the usefulness of the feedback supervisors provide to their employees (London, 2003). An element that makes feedback useful is that it is ongoing (Mone & London, 2010). Moreover, feedback that includes both an employee's strengths and weaknesses has also been demonstrated as providing a connection to greater engagement (Catteeuw et al., 2007). These can be implemented into career planning discussions, along with recognition and ongoing feedback to drive engagement (Mone et al., 2011). Reflecting on the variables of engagement, performance management systems can use continuous feedback, a discussion of career planning, and recognition to inspire engagement, and these should be built-in to any performance management system if it is to lead to increased engagement.

The rate that we can gather information and the demand for the use of technology are still weaknesses in today's performance management designs; although performance management is still a valid approach to drive performance in an organization. For example, *Harvard Business Review* published 436 articles about Performance Management in 2015 and 2016. The number of articles suggests that it is an essential topic for businesses and, moreover, Mone & London (2010) suggest that "performance management, effectively applied, will help...to create and sustain high levels of employee engagement, which leads to higher levels of performance" (p. 227). While organizations have tried to use performance management processes to achieve higher performance, it may make just as much sense to raise performance

levels by focusing on developing engagement (Gruman & Saks, 2011). The performance management tools stated above are focused on performance, not engagement. Therefore, my change is focused on adapting MBO to impact the employee's perception of engagement, within the performance management process, and more specifically, while setting goals during that process.

2.3 Goal Setting

Considering that the research on performance management does not focus heavily on engagement, I used Management By Objective (MBO) as the method to aid supervisors in discussing their employees' engagement. Because of MBO's acceptance as an effective management method, I have chosen to look at goal setting as the vehicle for a discussion between an employee and their supervisor. In that discussion, the concepts of engagement are embedded into the script to impact engagement in my organization. Focusing more on engagement, Medlin & Green (2009) share that research by Gallup confirmed that "goal setting leads to engaged employees" (p. 951). Grant (2012) defines goal setting as creating an action plan to help guide and motivate an employee or team toward a goal. This approach uses goal setting as an end. Whereas Latham & Yukl (1975) say, that goals are what an employee is consciously trying to achieve. This approach to goal setting is using the goal as a means. In both, the employee is intentionally working towards a defined goal.

The literature shows that a goal setting is a process that can be used to improve performance and impact the employee motivation (Dweck et al., 1993; Knight et al., 2001; Latham & Yukl, 1975; Matsui et al., 1987; Sujan et al., 1994; Tubbs, 1986, 1993). Useful goal setting results in a positive impact on an employee's contribution to the organization (Medlin & Green, 2009). Value-added goal setting enhances workplace performance while providing insights into behaviors that can positively impact performance (Grant, 2012). Goal setting also enhances the belief that employees can reach their goals and, as a result, increases engagement (Medlin & Green, 2000). With these thoughts in mind, I explored what the literature revealed about goal setting, looking for how it could be used as a method for a supervisor to discuss engagement with their employees.

During the goal-setting process, it is vital that supervisors communicate a distinct vision because the employee wants to know what goals their leaders have for them and their team, and they want to have a clear understanding of the organizational vision (Seijts & Crim, 2006). One way this can be done is using cascading goals, which involves taking the organizational goals, breaking them into department goals, then into unit goals, and finally into individual goals; this method of goal setting contributes to organizational success (Kaplan & Norton 1996). An example of cascading goals is if a school has a goal to raise the average reading and math standardized test scores by 2% and start three school programs to encourage student participation. The math department has the goal of 2% and two programs. The reading department has the goal of 2% and one program. The two Math teachers have 2%, and one program each and the reading teacher has 2% and one program. If you add the goals of the

teachers, it equals the goals of the school. Although the teachers cannot change the 2% increase to the average score or number of programs, in this example the teachers could create the programs that will best serve their students to increase scores by 2% and with their preferred teaching philosophy.

Although the process and breakdown may be different for different organizations, the idea is that the sum of the individual goals should correspond to or even fully align with the organizational goals. The idea that every employee shares a piece of the organization's goals relates to at least two variables: an employee's work environment and the vision/mission of the organization. When goals cascade down to all employees and the employee can see how their contribution, along with that of their co-workers and supervisors add up to organizational success, the contribution, fairness, and organizational success are all less complicated to understand.

I looked at the different methods to set goals within the performance management models, BSC, MBO, and TQM (Table 1). The goal setting methods I reviewed in the literature involved the supervisor working with the employee to establish goals. In some cases, the supervisor, as in the TQM approach, assigned the goals and in other cases, they were discussed and negotiated, as in MBO. All three methods involve setting measurable goals, but in BSC, the goals can be particularly challenging to measure because they are focused on employee development and involve non-performance goals such as response to feedback, ability to learn, and adaptability. The use of performance or non-performance goals does not make one performance management method better than another; they are merely designed to support

the specific, strategic control system of the organization (Muralidharan, 2004). Here, the strategic control system references the mechanisms put in place to control strategy content and strategy implementation (Muralidharan, 2004). I looked at goal setting with the approach that it is possible to set performance and non-performance goals that do not require measurable goals to be valuable; I also reviewed objective and subjective goals separately.

Performance goals are goals that can be measured by Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), for example, the average sales of a salesperson a month. It is crucial that when the organization measures the work of an employee, it communicates information about the employee's individual contribution, because a variable of engagement is the employee's sense that he is contributing to the success of the organization (Crawford, 2006; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Seijts & Crim, 2006). The goal-setting process also improves when the employee's input is meaningful to the success of the organization's goals, productivity, and processes (Seijts & Crim, 2006; Mone & London, 2010). An example of this is a salesperson recommending that a more senior salesperson act as a coach be added as a development resource to increase the amount of individual training a salesperson receives while practicing sales scripts, thus raising the salesperson sales. In this example, the employee feels engaged because their recommendation is heard by the organization and positively impacted the goal that was is measured.

Another way to improve goal setting is to make specific goals, which have been shown to produce a higher level of production that occurs then employees who make vague goals (Bezuijen et al., 2010). An example of a specific goal is that 80% of our team will meet their sales targets or above on their next month's goals. Compared to a vague goal such as our team will

sell more next month. Specific and vague goals are different from difficult or easy goals. More difficult goals have been found to lead to higher levels of performance than easy goals (Bezuijen et al., 2010). An example of an easy goal would be 40% of our team will meet their sales target next month, whereas a hard goal would be 95% of our team will meet their sales target next month. To be engaged, an employee wants to be challenged by their work demands so it will trigger personal growth (Crawford, LePine & Rich, 2010), and have goals that promote professional growth can positively impact engagement (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Additionally, employees who have a strong relationship with their supervisors tend to set more difficult learning goals and appear to be more eager to meet them (Bezuijen et al., 2010), leveraging the engagement variable of an employee's supervisor.

Goal setting can be both stressful and engaging. For example, goal setting can also be compromised and negatively impact real performance if it is used as a process to blindly pursue goals focused on issues that are easy to measure (Grant, 2012). An example of this would be using an employee's clock in and clock out time as a measurement of their performance. It assumes that being present is the same as performance. Goals that are limiting can impede professional growth and can negatively impact engagement (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Examples of goals that are stressful are goals that hinder personal growth or are otherwise unrealistic/contradictory, such as teaching students to meet testing scoring requirements and cutting the budget by 50%. Budget cuts of that magnitude would negatively impact continuing education for the teacher as well as needed funds to purchase classroom supplies intended to

support learning needs. The stress could leave an employee feeling unable to cope with work demands, as stated above, and would reduce engagement.

Goal setting: can positively impact performance, is already commonly accepted by our leaders, allows for an opportunity to provide feedback, to discuss what an employee can contribute, what it means to the employee to belong to the organization, and can signal potential opportunities to advance and the employee's work environment. What that in mind, I will use the concepts and main themes of employee engagement to design a goal setting process for my research project.

2.4 Literature Evaluation – Conclusion

Returning to Kahn's (1990) words: "in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (p.694). The literature of engagement is broad and I, like other researchers, am not able to draw a single definition of engagement. Therefore, for this research project, I propose that engaged employees must be able to employ/express themselves and need a work environment that supports their engagement. Work environment in this context is the conditions the organization creates for its employees within the culture, climate and normal of the work place. The employee's work environment needs to provide the opportunity for them to find a way or discuss with their supervisor a way, for them to emotionally connect with their work and make a difference in the organization. "Today, there is widespread agreement among academics and

practitioners that engaged employees are those who are emotionally connected to the organization and cognitively vigilant" (Seijts & Crim, 2006, p.1).

I found that many of the variables that lead to engagement fit into three key themes. As detailed above: the employee's emotional investment, the employee's work environment, and the employee's ability to make a difference. The question is: How can we use a goal setting process to give a supervisor and employee an opportunity to talk about these concepts and apply them to the goals of the employee? This question is an effort to support the notion of integrating the engagement literature to improve the goal setting process and how employee experience that process.

Similarly, Saks & Gruman (2011) suggest that organizations can enhance engagement by simplifying their performance management processes. The value is focusing attention on improving communication and relationships with employees. This is reinforced by the idea of supporting the employee's feeling of belonging to an organization through providing social support (Macey et al., 2009), and developing the employee's relationship with their supervisor (Christian et al., 2011), both of which support the employee's emotional energy and therefore positively impact his or her work. Another value of performance management process should be to create the right conditions for the employee to improve their performance (Saks & Gruman, 2011), by facilitating the employee's performance rather than trying to manage it (Das, 2003). An example of facilitating performance would be to increase the communication and improve relationships between the employee and their supervisor (Pulakos & O'Leary, 2001),

whereas a style focused on only managing would involve issuing directives with limited support, as when a supervisor tells the employee what is wrong and tells them to “just fix it.”

Reflecting on the literature presented above, I have chosen to focus on a goal setting process as a means of impacting the employee’s engagement by setting the stage to engage because the research that shows the possibilities of using goal setting as a tool. Goal setting is a vital component of performance management because it involves a discussion during which the supervisor and the employee define where the employee’s performance is making an impact. They agree on the goal and how the employee’s contribution will work towards that goal to represent strong performance management, which the research makes clear, is a variable of engagement. As an example, Mone et al. (2011) conclude in their research that “performance management can serve as a useful framework for managers, one that guides them in the day-to-day management of their employees’ performance while also fostering high levels of employee engagement and avoiding burnout” (p. 210). They also state “results do show a clear relationship between performance management activities and engagement” (p. 206).

Pulakos & O’Leary (2011) recommend that we spend less effort into changing our performance management systems and invest more time in training managers how to engage their employees on a day-to-day basis. Performance management is just a system until someone puts it into action. It is the supervisor who can have the most significant impact on engagement and performance. Agreeing with these ideas, and building on the research, I redesigned the performance management process in our organization to improve the use of

the goal setting session. I consider this step as a foundational element of engagement. We can train our supervisors how to leverage engagement variables to invite the employee to share how they would like to invest themselves emotionally in their work and to create an environment where employees can be engaged in their performance.

In this action research project, I designed a goal setting process around the variables of engagement to allow supervisors and employees to discuss how an employee can express themselves in their role and how they would like to develop within the organization. Building on the employee’s emotional investment, work environment, and ability to make a difference and using the variables for engagement within a conversation between the supervisor and employee to can provide this opportunity to discuss what will increase the employee's engagement. A summary of the 23 variables identified above is in Table 3.

Table 3 Variables of Employee Engagement	
Employee Emotional Investment	
1.	Employees are invested emotionally in their work (absorbed) (Christian et al., 2011; Kahn, 1990; Macey et al., 2009; Saks & Gruman, 2014)
2.	They can express themselves in their work (Kahn, 1990; Mone et al., 2011; Saks & Gruman, 2014; Schaufeli et al., 2002)
3.	Their work is meaningful, useful, worthwhile, challenging (Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010; Kahn, 1990; Seijts & Crim, 2006)

4. They have personal presences and have a level of energy for their work (Kahn, 1990; Macey et al., 2009; Seijts & Crim, 2006)
5. They can see themselves in the social construct of the organization (Kahn, 1990; Gebauer & Lowman, 2009; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003)
6. They trust their supervisor (Macey et al., 2009)
7. They embrace the beliefs, values, and goals of the organization (Macey et al., 2009)
8. They have the confidence that they can accomplish the goals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007)

Employee Work Environment

9. There is ongoing feedback about their work from their supervisor (Bakker and Bal, 2010; Catteeuw et al., 2007; Christian et al., 2011; Macey et al., 2009; Matsui, Kakuyama, & Onglatco, 1987; Mone & London, 2010; Pulakos, 2004)
10. Their work has task significance, variety, and work is done with some level of autonomy (Kahn, 1990; Christian et al., 2011; Mone & London, 2010)
11. There are resources to do their job effectively and hit their goals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010; Kahn, 1990; Mone & London, 2010)
12. There is a feeling of fairness within the organization (Macey et al., 2009; Maslach & Leiter, 1997)
13. They have new work opportunities (Seijts & Crim, 2006)
14. There is a high level of trust exists within the organization (Macey et al., 2009)

15.	There is social support in their teams (Christian et al., 2011; Macey et al., 2009; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003).
16.	They are in the right work environment (Bakker and Bal, 2010; Catteeuw et al., 2007; Christian et al., 2011; Kahn, 1990; Macey et al., 2009; Matsui, Kakuyama, & Onglatco, 1987; Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Pulakos, 2004) - <i>connect, career, clarity, convey, congratulate, contribute, control, collaborate, credibility, and confidence</i> (Seijts & Crim, 2006).
17.	Their supervisor acts in their best interest (Macey et al., 2009; Mone & London, 2010)
18.	They understand the strategy, vision, and/or direction of the organization (Mone & London, 2010; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003)
19.	There are career advancement opportunities with a clear career progression – they can see a path forward (Mone & London, 2010; Seijts & Crim, 2006)
20.	There are sufficient training opportunities (Mone & London, 2010; Crawford, 2006; Crawford, LePine & Rich, 2010)
Employee's Ability to Make a Difference	
21.	They know the work they do contributes to the overall goal of the organization (Crawford, 2006; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Seijts & Crim, 2006).
22.	They can improve the organizational productivity and processes (Seijts & Crim, 2006; Mone & London, 2010)

- | |
|--|
| 23. They can solve problems and can influence how work gets done (Macey et al., 2009); Mone & London, 2010; Seijts & Crim, 2006) |
|--|

I embedded these variables in the goal setting conversation to improve the goal setting process. The purpose of asking questions about these variables is to allow the supervisor and the employee to discuss how an employee feels about their work, work environment, professional development, and goals. More importantly, the questions enable the employee to discuss which variables are most important to them. For example, John is interested in how he does his work and would like to discuss his contribution in detail because he is motivated by creativity, being heard and his connection with his team. However, Bill is more interested in the next promotional opportunity and he would like to discuss professional growth as a way to prepare for that opportunity because his development and recognition motivate him. In both examples, the supervisor can talk about what is imperative to the organization, the employee can discuss what variables impact their engagement, and they can agree on goals to support what is valuable to both. With this focus, the design of the goal setting session should include an opportunity for employees to share how they want to emotionally express themselves in their role while being focused on their goals. As part of this research project, supervisors were trained on engagement, its elements, and variables so that they can lead a conversation with the employee regarding their potential contributions and development.

3. Methodology

My research focused on changing how our organization set goals by leveraging employee engagement literature. I did this by constructing a goal setting process and documents that used the variables of engagement found in the literature to facilitate a conversation between the supervisor and the employee. A primary objective of changing the goal setting method was to understand how people experienced the goal setting process and how modifying it would impact the overall value of the experience. In this chapter, I will discuss the methodology and how I created and changed the goal setting process.

3.1 Action Research

The methodological approach to this research project was to understand the goal setting process in general and to change our company's process using the Action Research (AR) cycle, as presented by Anderson et al. (2015), to create a better goal setting experience of our employees. Action research is the best approach for this project because AR is used by a researcher and his/her client to collaboratively solve a problem and generate new knowledge (Anderson et al., 2015). Action research uses a rigorous approach to look deeper into an organization's problem by examining an inside researcher's problem statement, situation, and possible outcomes and using critical reflection to learn what the researcher learned through his or her research project (Coghlan, 2011). In other words, Action Research provides a method for

a researcher to assess a problem with an understanding broader than the researcher's perspective. Moreover, an opportunity for an in-depth learning experience is not dependent on the research project meeting its desired outcomes.

Using action research allows researchers to expand their understanding of a problem beyond their personal experiences and toward a more evidence-based level of knowledge (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). In this case, action research is done by following a progressive process of defining a problem, planning, gathering data, acting and then researching the results of that action to plan and take further action (Anderson et al., 2015, p. 92). Moving past what is known gives an inside researcher a deeper insight into the problem by inquiring into how the participants' acts on their assumptions, bias, and values (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). The participation in action research is social and as such the research *studying, reframing, and reconstructing social practices* of reality, rather than abstract practices (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p. 277). Then, by reflecting on the outcomes of action research, an organization can move beyond their limited understanding of their problem at hand (Greenwood & Levin, 2007).

The Action Research approach involves action, research, and participation (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). In the case of this research project, the goal was to involve the employees of our organization to improve the goal setting process and impact engagement. I wrestled with the question: How can the employee engagement literature improve the goal setting process and how employees experience that process? Action research allowed me to link inquiry to actions to provide insights from the employee's in response to the literature (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). The action was to change the goals setting process. The research was exploring the

literature and asking the employees what they thought about a redesigned goal setting process that used literature to inform the questions within the process. Volunteers who participated in this project were the employees and supervisors of Auto Club. Reflecting on Coghlan's (2011) work, using action research allowed us to move from what we know about goal setting and engagement, to how we know the goal setting process can be improved using engagement literature in my organization.

3.1.1 Inside Research

During this research project, I was the Director of Operations and was promoted to the Vice President of Strategy after the data collection was complete. As the Director of Operations, I was one of five executive leaders in the organization, reporting to the CEO, and had authority over the human resources department. In the context of this research project, my individual goals as a leader in the organization aligned with my goals as a researcher, to improve the quality of goals set in our organization and the experience of the employees during the goal setting process. In my organizational role, I traveled to all our locations, worked with all our leaders and met many of our employees. Many of the requests that I received from employees was to help resolve a concern, respond to complaints, or remove obstacles. As a result, I had a firm understanding of the formal and informal structures of the organization, and in many ways, built trust with the employees to work in both. My relationships, concern for others and earned trust gave me an advantage in introducing a new goal setting process and provided many insights when planning action.

Both my goals as a leader and researcher, along with my role in the organization and experience in the organization gave me a solid foundation to maintain a dual focus of inquiry and implementation as described by Coghlan (2011). Another vital aspect for the support of this action research project was our CEO's endorsement. Our CEO has an earned respect and trust of all of the leaders and employees, as demonstrated by being nominated and voted boss of the year in our local community, and his support boosted the influence needed to launch a new organizational process. However, this project was not without its resistance. In the short term, I was asking leaders to take on new and more work to change the goal setting process. Leaders, specifically one of my executive peers, did not want to change the way they set goals and those leaders resisted adopting new techniques. As an example, my personality is quick to adopt what the organization and supervisor wanted me to. Therefore, I was quick to dismiss adoption concerns from other leaders, and my lack of inquiry about those concerns reveal themselves in the results of this project as discussed in chapter five.

As an inside researcher, I had access and experience to the organization's problems and paradoxes (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010) and therefore had a unique perspective on whom to design engagement variables within a goal setting process created for our culture. However, I did not stand on the sidelines and watch a new process unfold in my organization as a spectator. My goals as a leader in the organization were based on improving organizational performance and to redesign the performance management system. I was not only responsible for both the performance and performance management system, but I was also a past participant, which means I was a part of the problems and paradoxes. I would also be a participant in the new goal

setting system, as a supervisor as well as an employee. Therefore, as I reviewed the literature and planned action, I did it together in partnerships with members of my organization (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010).

As a scholar practitioner and inside researcher, this research project and my journey around the Action Research Cycle has changed who I am. I have changed where I find information used to invoke an action, how I expect knowledge to be created, and my expectations of quality and rigor. In this chapter, I will discuss how I used the Action Research Cycle to develop awareness, understanding, and skills to create appropriate actions, evaluate results and suggest future actions described by Coghlan (2011). In chapter six, I will share personal reflections on my bias and growth during this project.

3.1.2 Pre-Thesis Research Setting

The initial goal setting process created by the consultants, deployed before this research project, was launched organization-wide as an initiative to set our annual goals and to improve performance. In the initial process 20 supervisors were trained and 95 employees, including supervisors, completed the process. As discussed in Chapter 1, what our organization did to increase employee performance was not working. The specific business problem was that the goals set by employees were vague and incomplete. As discussed above, our organization's employees are not increasing their performance more than in small increments year-over-year, and the organization has only seen 1% to 2% growth over the past 12 years, as our peers have

grown 4% to 6%. Additionally, supervisors have not been trained or provided specific directions to set goals with their employees that were meaningful to the organization. We initially worked with consultants to address this problem and created a new company brand, culture, strategy, and goal setting process to align the organization towards our mission. The new goal setting process created in the context of the new brand and culture relied heavily on the experience of the consultants. However, the new process was underdeveloped and did not meet the desired outcome which was to engage employees during the process so that they willingly set higher goals, ones that align more fully to the organization's goals and increase the likelihood of higher productivity.

For this project and during an Action Research Cycle, I applied the variables of engagement from the literature in a redesigned goal setting process. Applying themes from the literature, I used employee's emotional investment, work environment, and ability to make a difference as a foundation of the goal setting process. The importance of the employee's emotional investment is that they can express themselves out of a sense of intrinsic motivation, mindfulness about and interest in their work, which results in being more productive (Kahn, 1990). Organizations need to create the right work environment to maintain an employee's engagement (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Then organizations need to allow employees to make a difference to the organization and to themselves to retain employees (Seijts & Crim, 2006). Employees who can impact the organization, have the right work environment, and promotional opportunities are inspired an emotional connection to the organization (Seijts & Crim, 2006), which supports the employee's emotional investment. The goal of using these themes in the

redesigned goal setting process was to improve the experience of the participants and meet the desired outcome of the goal setting process.

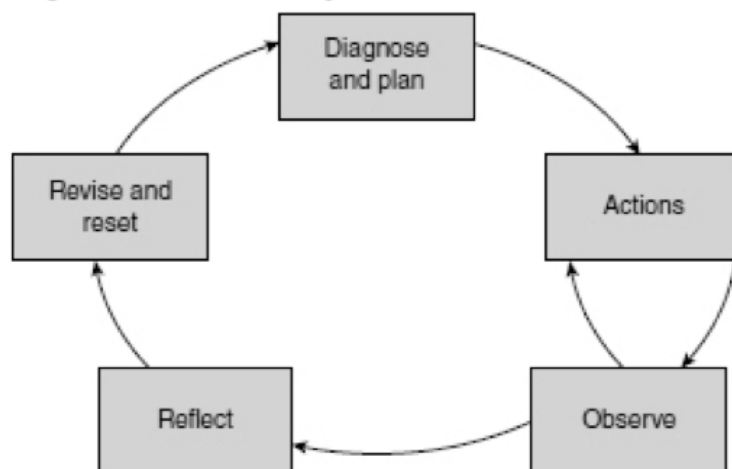
3.1.3 The Research Participants

For this project, we trained 11 supervisors and 88 employees, including supervisors, to set goals during the process. I asked for volunteers from this group to participate in the research interviews. I recruited employees as volunteers for this research project who participated in the re-designed goal setting process to set goals for the following year. Using insights from Creswell (2013), these volunteers were from a homogeneous sample: from the same geographic area and who aligned to the same set of organizational goals. Creswell is a generalist; which seminal theorists did include/follow for these recommendations and samples, etc. An email was sent to recruit employees of the organization as volunteers, asking if they would like to provide feedback for the redesigned goal setting process. The volunteers were asked to contact Human Resources to receive a participant number and were scheduled for requisite meetings based on their goal setting session with their supervisor. Volunteers were informed that it was for this research project, and their feedback would be used for this thesis and to improve the goal setting process. In total, 24 employees volunteered to complete the entire process, including three supervisors, which was facilitated by one of four supervisors. Although line employee's and supervisors' goals varied, the goal setting process was the same, but the expectation was that the process would produce different types of goals. The participants amounted to

approximately 25% of the potential participant population and was a manageable workload given the requirements and time frame of this research project.

3.2 Action Research Cycle

The AR Cycle focuses on understanding why the new goal setting process, constructed in the pre-thesis setting, did not achieve its intended result and how to improve the process using a thesis literature review. On my journey through the cycle, I assessed our goals setting process, considered insights from the literature on how to redesign the steps, and focused on using engagement literature to improve the questions. Also, I reflected on the findings and returned to the literature to suggest future research. I used the revise and reset to propose future changing based on the findings.



Action Research Cycle (Anderson et al., 2015, Page 115, Figure 5.1)

3.2.1 Diagnose and Plan

Anderson et al. (2015) shared that data can be gathered and analyzed at each stage of the process. In the *Diagnose and Plan* stage, I reviewed notes from the conversation sheets, scorecards, and feedback from the goal setting process. I inquired about the process to employees and supervisors to gain their perspective. Then I used the literature to analyze my notes and the documents. Lastly, I used what I learned from the literature to redesign the goal setting process, including the conversation sheets and scorecards, as well as a new supervisor training.

3.2.2 Actions and Observations

The observing stage was useful to collect data from the participants themselves and about their questions (Herbert et al., 2002). To make sense of the literature, I used an iterative approach and reasoning to move from my observations to the literature and make sense of the emerging knowledge creation. I used theoretical coding to group similar responses from the data into categories using a systematic process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Identifying and organizing into five themes, I followed King's (2004) *Templates in the Thematic Analysis of Text* to design a template based on themes drawn from the literature. Following his advice, in Table 4, I present how I organized the literature concepts into textual tree nodes, or themes. To create the themes from the literature, I examined each concept or variable of engagement and made sense of them by organizing them into categories that had a common relationship between the concepts and

engagement. After I organized all of the engagement concepts into categories, I named the emerging theme and reviewed the concepts again to consider their placement in that theme. I expected these themes to evolve throughout the AR Cycle as participants co-created the interpretation of the engagement concepts, as you will see in the coding table 6, later in this chapter. In Table 4 below, I assigned concepts to each theme to explain how to operationalize the idea for use in the organization, in addition to listing the overall theme.

Table 4 A Priori Coding			
Tree Node (Theme)	Themes from Literature	Associated Concepts	References
The Organization	I am engaged in the overall mission/ work of the organization.	The employee embraces the belief values and goals of the organization. S/he understands the strategy, vision, and/or direction of the organization.	Macey et al., 2009; Mone & London, 2010; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003
Work Environment	I am a part of the organization.	The organization has the right work environment. The employees can express themselves. Their work contributes to the success of the organization; they have the resources to do their jobs, can influence how work gets done, and can improve productivity and processes. There is a feeling of fairness and social support; they are a	Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker and Bal, 2010; Catteeuw et al., 2007; Christian et al., 2011; Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010; Gebauer & Lowman, 2009; Kahn, 1990; Macey et al., 2009; Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Matsui, Kakuyama, & Onglatco, 1987; Mone et al., 2011; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Pulakos, 2004; Saks & Gruman,

		part of the social construct. Their supervisor acts in their best interest and provides ongoing feedback. Employees trust their supervisors and the organization.	2014; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Seijts & Crim, 2006
My Work	I am engaged in the work I do.	The employee is emotionally invested and can express themselves in their work. They have a personal presence and have a level of energy for their work. The employee's work is meaningful, useful, worthwhile and challenging. The work has task significance, variety, and to do work with some level of autonomy. They have a personal presence and energy for their work. Can solve problems and influence how work gets done.	Christian et al., 2011; Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010; Kahn, 1990; Macey et al., 2009; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Mone & London, 2010; Saks & Gruman, 2014; Seijts & Crim, 2006
My Goals	I know and understand my goals.	The employee has confidence that he or she can accomplish their goals. Goals are specific and measurable.	Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bezuijen, et al., 2010.
Promotions & Professional Development	There is a future for me in this organization.	There are new work and career advancement opportunities with a clear career progression and	Crawford, 2006; Crawford, LePine & Rich, 2010; Mone & London, 2010; Seijts & Crim, 2006

		sufficient training opportunities.	
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During the analysis, I wrote key ideas from my observations of the supervisors and employees during the process, comments from notes I made during conversations, ideas that I captured in my journal, and interview answers onto Post-it notes and matched each note with its corresponding category. For example, the statement, “I wish I knew more about what everyone was doing” fit best under the “Synergy Between Employee and Organization” tree node. My office’s whiteboard walls made it easy to collect, arrange, and rearrange post-its and dry erase notes. I used different color post-its and markers to organize my notes and ideas. I described the process in detail in section 3.2.3 Data Interpretation.

Action research does not preclude traditional data collecting methods and leverages both qualitative and quantitative tools (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). As an inside researcher, both as an executive leader in the organization and with authority over the human resources information system, I had unlimited access to documents, records, and historical data. I could access past goal setting documentation and performance scorecards, as well as current organizational goals, performance metrics, and financials. With these insights, I learned what to expect as goals because of the goal setting process, such as what was a useful goal for selling a specific product or what details are needed to measure success for an activity. I used a journal to capture notes while reviewing documents, observations of leaders or employees, record key

ideas during training, and identify questions to research later. Notes from my journal were later used to reflect on experiences and integrate information into those experiences (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). For example, I recorded in my journal that sales agents would use goals for outbound calls, writing quotes and sales of the product. Of these three goals, only the sale of the product would be considered a success for that position. I did not understand what they need for the other two goals. I later learned that sales agents used a sales funnel model for predicting sales, such as 100 calls lead to 20 quotes, 20 quotes lead to five sales, and they need five sales to reach their goal. Therefore, the added information of the sales funnels allowed me to understand what goals to expect to see for a sales agent of that product.

3.3.2.1 Actions to Improve Goal Setting Process

I used the information gained from the literature review to reflect on the pre-thesis goal setting process critically and why it did not achieve the desired outcome. After completing an analysis of the process, documents and results, I used the variables of engagement to redesign the goals setting process. In analyzing the documents from this iteration of the goal setting process, I concluded that there were several shortcomings. These included the goal setting process did not meet its desired outcome, many goals were not measurable, there was a lack of professional development goals, and employee feedback was vague. To address these issues, I used the literature to improve the goal setting process structure, inputs, documents, expected outcomes, and supervisor training of the process.

3.3.2.2 Data Collection

For this research project, pre-interviews, documents from the goal setting session, and post-interviews were used to collect data. Pre-interviews, which took place before the employee who volunteered met with their supervisors to set goals using the redesigned process, was created to learn to what degree an employee was exposed to the variables of engagement in the past and how they responded to those variables in their past work environment.

I created the interview questions to focus on the participants' experience in goal setting and to understand their thoughts about the goal setting experience, with a focus on the employee's level of engagement during each experience (Table 2). I chose to start with a closed-ended yes or no question to determine whether the employee had experienced a specific engagement variable in a previous goal setting process. Based on that answer, I explored the quality of that experience via open-ended questions, which allowed me to focus on the response rather than on a hypothesis I had (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). The goal of the open-ended questions was to capture data that was important to the participant, rather than leading them to answer using closed-ended questions. The interviews included qualitative questions, in a semi-structured format, about goal setting, engagement, and the organization. I followed up with participants' answers with phrases such as *tell me more*, *how did you*, or *how would you* follow up questions specific to their answers. I also used probing questions specific to the participant's response following these engagement-oriented questions, such as "tell me what

you liked about getting feedback,” or “why did you feel that the team was working well together.”

The post-interviews were designed to learn how the employee experienced the redesigned goal setting process. I scheduled participants to call for their post-interview following their goal setting conversations. Like pre-interviews, the questions started with a yes or no, then moved to probing questions based on their responses. The questions were different from the pre-interview questions, but both interviews have similar questions to explore the similar and different experiences from their past and the redesigned goal setting session. The pre and post-interview questions are based on the variables of engagement found in the literature (Table 5).

Table 5 Engagement Variables and Interview Questions		
Engagement Variables	Pre-questions	Post-questions
Opening question	Tell me about a time when you have done goal setting in the past.	How was that? What did you like? What would you change?
1. The employee is emotionally invested in their work.	What is employee engagement? What is engagement? Were you engaged in your goals?	Do you feel engaged in these goals? How do you know you are engaged?
2. They can express themselves in their work.		
3. Their work is meaningful, useful, worthwhile, challenging.		

4. They have a personal presence and have a level of energy for their work.	How do you know if you are engaged in your work?	
5. They know the work they do contributes to the overall goal(s) of the organization.	<p>Did the organization share its goals with you?</p> <p>Did you understand your role in achieving those goals?</p>	<p>Did the organization share its goals with you?</p> <p>Did you understand your role in achieving those goals?</p>
6. They can see themselves in the social construct of the organization.	Did you feel like you belonged to that organization?	Is there anything else you would like to add about your work environment?
7. They trust their supervisor.	<p>Tell me about your relationship with your supervisor in the past.</p> <p>How would you describe that relationship?</p>	<p>Describe your relationship with your supervisor.</p> <p>How were your goals set (assigned or self-selected/created)?</p>
8. They embrace the beliefs, values, and goals of the organization.	<p>Did you understand the organization's mission and vision of the past?</p> <p>Did you believe in it?</p>	<p>Do you understand the organization's mission and vision?</p> <p>Do you believe in it?</p> <p>Can you recite it?</p>
9. They have confidence that they can accomplish the goals.	Were you successful in meeting your goals in the past?	Do you feel engaged in these goals?

10. There is ongoing feedback about their work from their supervisor.	<p>Have you had professional goal setting sessions with your supervisor in the past?</p> <p>Did you receive ongoing feedback about your performance in the past?</p>	Do you know how your supervisor will provide feedback to you about your goals?
11. They can improve the organization's productivity and processes.	Could you influence how work is done in the past?	Tell me about the goals that you set?
12. Their work has task significance and variety and is done with some level of autonomy.	Tell me about your work in the past. How much variety and ownership did you have?	Can you influence how the organization does work?
13. They could solve problems and can influence how to do work.	Could you influence how work was done in the past?	
14. There are resources to do their job effectively and hit their goals.	<p>What help you hit your goals in the past – Resources?</p> <p>Did you have the needed resources in the past to meet your goals?</p>	Do you have the needed resources to meet your goals?
15. There is a feeling of fairness within the organization.	[Goal setting and performance reviews] Did you have a voice?	Did you have a voice during your conversation?
16. They have new work opportunities.	Have you had an opportunity to share where you wanted to develop yourself professionally in the past?	What advancements are you interested in?
17. There is a high level of trust within the organization.	Tell me about your relationship with your supervisor in the past.	Tell me about your past work environment.

18. There is social support in their teams.	Tell me about your teams in the past. Did you have team goals? Could you impact how your team performed towards those goals?	What did you think about your team's goals? Do you feel like you could impact your team's performance?
19. They are in the right work environment.	Tell me about your past work environment.	Has this process changed your perception of your work environment?
20. Their supervisor acts in their best interest.	Tell me about your relationship with your supervisor in the past.	Describe your relationship with your supervisor.
21. They understand the strategy, vision, and direction of the organization.	Did you understand the organization's mission and vision of the past? Did you believe in it?	Are you engaged in your work for this organization?
22. There are career advancement opportunities with a clear career progression – they can see a path forward.	Have you had an opportunity to share where you wanted to develop yourself professionally in the past? What did that look like?	Have you had an opportunity to share how you wanted to develop?
23. There are sufficient training opportunities.	Get training to prepare for those opportunities?	Are you set to get training/support to prepare for those opportunities?
Other Questions		How has this changed your view of goal setting?

During interviews, a digital recorder was used to capture participants' responses. I chose to use a digital recorder over note taking to provide the freedom for me to actively listen to

responses and consider possible probing and clarifying questions. I also did not have the resources to use a note taker to assist in taking notes during the interviews. Furthermore, I used a digital recorder so that the audio recording could easily be saved to an encrypted drive and deleted from the device to maintain confidentiality. As the research process is fluid, dynamic and emergent (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010), the recording assisted in creating a reliable record of the data. The digital recording provided the benefit of being able to return to the original conversation during the analysis process when new insights emerged. Pursuant to the state laws where I conducted the interviews, I notified the participants that I was going to record the conversation, asked for consent and told them when the recording began and ended.

All goal setting documents were submitted to the Human Resources department. Here, an employee volunteered to label the documents by replacing participants' names with their corresponding participant numbers. The documents were then saved digitally as not to have paper documents accessible. I used a cloud-based organizational system for keeping track of data and allowing for reliable and flexible access to the recordings and documents. The recordings and outcomes from the goal setting sessions were kept in their original form in a password protected, private drive accessible only to myself and our IT team to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Documents were saved by date, participant number, and named for their type of data, such as participants' roadmaps (formally called scorecards), conversation sheet or interview.

I reviewed the formal documentation from the redesigned goal setting sessions to gain a better understanding of the information that was discussed during the sessions when I was

not in the room. I reviewed conversations sheets and employee roadmaps. Roadmaps are a table where participants write their goals at the end of their goal setting conversation. During the review, I was able to determine who collected the data, when, why and for what purpose, which provided a solid foundation for validity and reliability when using secondary data (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). Also, the information was directly relevant to the goal setting process.

3.2.3 Data interpretation - A Priori Coding

Borrowing from the action science approach, I drew on insights from *The Ladder of Inference* to help make meaning of the data in relation to my own experiences, beliefs, and conclusions (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). I analyzed the data several times to check and reflect on my own, a process that was made easier because I used the original documents from the goal setting sessions and recordings of the interviews.

To identify similar responses, during my first review, I listened for descriptive words that were repeated by several participants (Anderson et al., 2015). For example, “I did not know my goals,” “I did what I was told,” or “we worked together.” These responses were easy to group. There were other responses that were more difficult to group, such as, “the conversation was great,” “that went well,” and “wow, that was not what I expected.” What made them difficult is that they did not identify a specific code, and I had to make a choice on the best code to record them.

Then, on my second review, using abductive reasoning, I was able to move back and forth between the data and the literature to explore the possibilities of the responses (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). I was able to use the abductive process to cluster similar responses within the themes of the literature and responses of the participants. During my third review of the interviews, I adjusted coding to confirm the accuracy of my quotes and consistency of coding. Finally, I reviewed the comments by code and identified key points, and several references to that point, related to my research questions. Examples of key points would be: the participants think their goals are attainable or they believe they have a future with the organization, while examples of references would be: not having goals and believing they are stuck in their current position. By using post-it notes on a whiteboard, I was able to capture and re-organize ideas easily.

The first time reading the conversations sheets, I read thoroughly to gain an overall understanding of how the sheets were filled out and the content that was captured. The second review, I made notes on what information was expected but missing. The third review, I looked for details in the content, for example, numbers to define goals or specific behaviors that were identified to be developed. The last review, I read each question and the response to that question and made notes on why I thought the supervisor did not answer the question entirely.

After I completed the four rounds of listening to interviews and four reviews of the conversation sheets and road maps, I ensured that the ideas shared on the documents had been appropriately matched with the themes of engagement outlined in Table 3. From here, I looked to the word clusters and considered how well they did or did not fit the wording from the coding

template outlined in Table 3. Lastly, as I typed my notes for Table 5, I refined my theme statements and then did a final review to ensure that the participants' responses had been categorized correctly in terms of themes.

The following is an analysis of the open-ended questions, for which I used an open coding, allowing participants to establish the coding rather than the research or me. The subcategories were created using open coding (King, 2004) and I used words or short quotes from the participants, which I captured and then organized using the post-it notes. The words in the subcategories were chosen by listening to/reading the words of the participants and returning to the ideas found in the literature (King, 2004). Table 6 was constructed based on the participants' responses to the interview questions, compared to Table 4 which was created using from the literature. Responses in Table 5 were used to adjust how the themes were articulated and adding an additional theme from the responses.

Table 6 Coding of Data from Interviews and Goal Setting Documents		
Themes from Participants	Associated concepts	Example coding

Level of Engagement with the Organization's Work	<p>Pre-interviews</p> <p>Care for the customer, know where the organization is going, not engaged in the organization</p> <p>Post-interviews</p> <p>Care for the customer, a belief in what the organization does, desire to make a difference (as an employee)</p>	<p>"We care for our customer."</p> <p>"I know what is happening."</p> <p>"I was engaged in the work, not the business."</p> <p>"I didn't know the mission of the organization."</p> <p>"We believe in what we are doing."</p> <p>"We care about the member (customer)."</p> <p>"We want to make a difference."</p> <p>"Our mission is to Prepare and Protect."</p>
Level of Engagement with the Individual's Work	<p>Pre-interviews</p> <p>Give 100%, provide value, choose goals, receive feedback, contribute outside of the individual role</p> <p>Post-interviews</p> <p>Receive feedback, thinking 1-3 years, a passion to do better, feel engaged, believe in what we do</p>	<p>"When I am able to make a difference."</p> <p>"When I am delivering significant value."</p> <p>"I want to set my goals higher."</p> <p>"When I receive feedback."</p> <p>"I am focused on the long term."</p> <p>"I have a passion to do better."</p> <p>"I am able to give 100% to what I am doing."</p> <p>"I feel like I am engaged in my work."</p> <p>"I believe in what we are here to do."</p>
Synergy Between Employee and Organization	<p>Pre-interviews</p> <p>Asked if they could help, offered advice; here, try this; liked feedback, noticed my work, supportive, didn't like the performance rating system for reviews, decisions were not mine, liked one-on-one conversations, liked</p>	<p>"I didn't know the goals of my supervisor or the department."</p> <p>"I like to know what is happening around the company."</p> <p>"I wish I knew more about what everyone was doing."</p>

	<p>coworkers, know what is happening</p> <p>Post-interviews knowing the organization, supervisor, or team goals, having team goals, how my goals roll up, goals of the organization are clear, the mission is known</p>	<p>"I like it when the team is going for the goals together." "We all helped each other; I felt good about the work environment." "We are going to work together to hit our goals."</p>
Performance Feedback	<p>Pre-interviews Generic feedback, feedback once a year, employee liked the feedback</p> <p>Post-interviews Feedback to a supervisor, received feedback, specific feedback, feedback on goals, liked one-on-one conversations</p>	<p>"I was thankful for the feedback." "I don't like getting generic feedback." "I didn't like getting feedback only once a year." "No one told me [that] before." "The feedback went both ways." "I liked getting specific feedback on my goals." "I liked getting specific feedback on how I work with my team." "I was told not to be scared to sign up for high goals and not hit them."</p>
Goal Setting Process	<p>Pre-interviews Goals were assigned, I set my own goals, no goals were set, we used the same goals as the year before.</p> <p>Post-interviews Went well, worked together to set goals, interactive process, the process was clear, liked the questions, supervisor helped me.</p>	<p>"I never set goals in the past." "They just gave me my goals." "I got a sheet on my desk with my new goals on it." "The goals were all my idea." "I like the questions in the process." "I feel like we do not have open lines for communication." "I felt like I did all the talking and I came up with my goals."</p>

		<p>"That went really well."</p> <p>"I feel like I was controlling the process."</p>
Goals and Attainability	<p>Pre-interviews</p> <p>Not feasible, not personal, all numbers, just company values, unknown if possible, added more every year, out of blue</p> <p>Post-interviews</p> <p>Goals were "real," my idea, learned ways to write more, challenging but reachable, see every day, deeper discussion to understand, clear goals</p>	<p>"My goals were set kinda low."</p> <p>"My goals were the same every year, just higher."</p> <p>"yes [my goals] were only numbers."</p> <p>"I didn't know my goals, only to sell more."</p> <p>"I was engaged in the process." "I learned ways to write more goals."</p> <p>"My goals are challenging, but reachable."</p> <p>"I can see my scorecard every day."</p> <p>"The conversation gave me a better understanding of why I had these goals."</p>
Focus on Future	<p>Pre-interviews</p> <p>Focused on their current role, lack of training, lack of development, didn't know how to move up, online training only</p> <p>Post-interviews</p> <p>Opportunity to receive training, continuing education, promotion. Apply training</p>	<p>"We didn't get trained."</p> <p>"It was a small business and no room to promote."</p> <p>"All of our training was online."</p> <p>"We went to training but did not apply it when we got back."</p> <p>"I didn't see a future with them."</p> <p>"I understood the process on how I could get development opportunities."</p> <p>"I felt supported to get more training."</p> <p>"We agreed to what training I would get this year."</p> <p>"We did not talk about promotions."</p>

3.2.4 Reflections

Reflections on the earlier stages and drawing conclusions are meaningful when creating a new plan (Anderson et al., 2015). The reflection stage of the process has become the dominant feature of the action research approach and is useful in making action research a social, participatory, practical, collaborative, and emancipatory process (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). Reflecting allows the researcher an opportunity to step back from the experience and question what is happening and gain insights into new future action (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010). Using reflections researchers can improve the way they work, as well as how they use knowledge to act (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). In my reflections of the actions and data from the earlier stage in the cycle, and what will come of my research and what the results tell us about the goals setting process. Upon reflection of this project, these are the areas that could be revised and revisited, such as ongoing feedback, support conversations about promotions, reducing complexity in the process, prioritizing engagement variables, simplifying the goal setting process, understanding more about the relationship with the supervisor, and getting supervisor buy-in to the process. In chapter 6, I will discuss these areas and potential next steps.

3.2.5 Revise and Reset (Revise Plan)

Using the reflections and conclusions of one cycle leads into the diagnose and planning of the next, as shown in The Spiral of Action Research Cycle, the stages of action research as

planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Sankara et al., 2001, referencing Zuber-Skerritt, 2001). It is important to note that action research cycles as described appears to be self-contained stages used in the research process, but in reality, I found that I moved between them as stages since they overlapped to make sense of what was happening. Furthermore, using an action research cycle as a method does not stop after one cycle. Reflections and conclusions from one cycle should be used to inform the plan in the following cycles. In chapter 7 I discuss suggested revisions and ideas to reset the goals setting process in future research or other organizations.

3.3 Research Ethical Considerations

During the execution of this research project, I did not experience anything that rose to the level of ethical concern or should have been reported, as defined by the Ethics Committee. When I considered this research project, I considered the psychological, relational, and economic/professional risk of the participants. I reduced the psychological risk through the communication that participation was voluntary, and a participant could withdraw from the research project at any time, with or without an explanation. It is important to note that if an employee felt pressure to participate, it was because of the invite from the CEO to volunteer, persuasion from their supervisor or peers. These pressures seemed unlikely as I surveyed only 25% of possible employees and I did not hear a comment during the interviews to suggest otherwise. Although there is no way to completely mitigate risk to an employee who does or

does not volunteer, I did not observe or hear a material concern from any employee. Confidentiality was also considered by not recording names on any documents other than the consent forms. All documents and recordings were saved on an encrypted drive protected by password using single-factor authentication, with PCI compliant password complexity method. Access was only be granted to myself and the organization's two-person IT team, both of whom have signed confidentiality agreements with the organization.

Additionally, goal setting sessions were conducted by each participant's supervisor and during the regular goal setting period to reconcile relational risk. Admittedly, any employee must accept a degree of vulnerability to participate and share about feelings of disengagement from his/her work. The organization's standard communication and enforcement policies were used during the goal setting process to reconcile economic/professional risks, such as an employee's rights found in the employee handbook, including our open-door policy, grievance procedure, and constructive discharge policy. While we created the goal setting process and trained the supervisors to complete the process, I was a supervisor of 12 leaders. However, I accepted a role in another division of the organization where I, as an executive, had no authority or influence on the goals set during this process. I recognize that the participant may have been influenced to sign up for the research project because it was a project that I was leading, because I have been a coach or mentor for many, the supervisor for a few, and friends with some. However, I did not have a direct influence on the organizational, department or individual goals while the participants set their goals in November and December of 2016 for 2017.

4. AR Cycle: Diagnose and Plan

The goal of this stage was to learn what went wrong in the new goal setting process, why it did not achieve its desired outcome of having the total of the employee's goals to add up to be more than the organizational goals and how to create the AR Cycle Plan. To do this, I conducted an initial goal setting process assessment. The assessment described in Chapter One was sufficient to identify the initial problem statement of the goal setting process created by consultants but was underdeveloped due to having been completed without using the information later gained from the literature. To build on that assessment, I reviewed the documents produced during the goal setting session, which included conversation sheets and employee roadmaps (employee goals) using the literature to guide my analysis. I looked at possibilities of why employees' goals only added up to 66% of the organization's goals and how the cultural tools, such as AIM, the drama triangle, and the environment survey, were being used.

4.1 AR Cycle: Diagnose

As discussed in Chapter 3, I examined the documents to learn more about the results of the process and to capture key themes. Themes that emerged from conversations sheets included: Goal setting process, goals, promotions and professional development, which are described in turn below.

4.1.1 Goal Setting Process

Supervisors did not appropriately know how to prepare for the conversations. There were limited directions, outside of the initial training to help supervisors prepare for the conversations. This was evidenced by the lack of detail to support the notes captured for each question. For example, “good job,” “budget exceeded,” and “better rapport with employees” were comments in the feedback section of the conversation sheets. I also noticed that the conversation sheets did not discuss how the employees met their goals during the past performance period or what their goals were last period. This was expected because, at the time leading up to this project, the employees generally did not set goals. In addition, there were few conversations about how the employees could improve or how they set their goals or performance expectations in the past. In some cases, the questions were left blank, with no answer or explanation. Although many steps that could be taken to resolve these issues, I choose to focus on how to get more specific answers to the questions and without the information from the answers it was too difficult to access other possible reasons.

The conversation sheet and scorecard forms lacked the direction that was needed to remind supervisors what was expected in the answer each question to deliver the intended result. For example, the scorecard forms said, “what results will I deliver,” which was unclear because that heading did not specify what should be recorded in the answer, like measurement or how you know when you reached your goal. When the question from the conversation sheets referred to a culture tool, the response did not fit with the intent of that tool. For example, when

the question asked the employee about their work environment, the culture tool used the words *clarity, atmosphere, and talent*. These three words do not explicitly link to the work environment. One example of how this question was answered referred to how an employee could spend more time working out of the office, thus more time working out of the work environment. In this example, the question was asking the employee to give the supervisor feedback on the work environment, and the employee is requesting to work outside of the work environment.

We did not integrate Auto Club's overall information, such as the organization's goals, into the form to prompt supervisors to discuss how the employee fits into the success of the organization. At Auto Club, we have an organizational roadmap that shares the annual goals of the organization with all employees. However, the organizational roadmap was not referenced in the conversation sheets of employees. Instead, comments from the conversation sheets said, "relevant store," "consistency in service," or "improve the process" when the organization's goals are to "increase sales by 6%," "improve satisfaction by 2%," and "increase operating margin by .5%", respectively. There is no clear alignment on what the organization is trying to do and what the employees have committed for their goals.

While I surveyed the completed employee scorecards, I reviewed the literature regarding the variables of engagement for the employee and the organization. First, I considered that an engaged employee embraces the beliefs, values, and goals of the organization (Macey et al., 2009), yet there was no evidence that this variable was discussed or used to set goals. In the space on the scorecard provided for the employee to write how their work related to the

organization's brand, there were comments such as "Culture. Change," "Trust + Support," and many employees left it blank. While the employee may have known how the work he or she did contribute to the overall goal of the organization (Crawford, 2006; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Seijts & Crim, 2006), they were less likely to recognize how their work supported the beliefs, values, and goals of the organization.

For example, the goal of the organization is to grow in sales year-over-year, but an employee did not have a clear understanding of what the organization sold last year and how his or her's relatively small contributions added up to the overall number due to the many sales channels that were used. In other words, our employees sold approximately 18% of our total sales, and the other 82% were through direct mail and the website. Many of our employees sell about 0.5% of our total sales, and it is difficult to see their work impact the overall organizational results.

4.1.2 Goals

Specific, measurable goals with an obvious way to know when they have been reached were not recorded on the employee scorecards. Many scorecards did not have numbers to define what the employee committed to as a goal, two examples were, "hit your numbers" or "exceed budget." Although numbers and budgets are measurable, the numbers, for example, were not written anywhere in the goal setting documents. Therefore, there is no evidence that the employee knew what their numbers were. Other goals were also recorded in terms that did

not clearly define what the target was, with such statements as “skills transfer” or “supportive” being used in this section. Additionally, supervisors had access to other organizational tools, such as budgets or performance results, which were referenced in the conversation notes or scorecard and therefore were not clearly stated for the employee to see, meaning they did not transfer the specific numbers for that employee from those tools on to the conversation sheets. For example, on some scorecards goals were written as “exceed your budget,” rather than “\$300,000 of new business sales.” In general, the effectiveness of the goal setting process was diminished by a lack of specificity, a problem that leads to decreased levels of production (Bezuijen et al., 2010).

4.1.3 Promotions and Professional Development

As noted in the literature, new work opportunities (Seijts & Crim, 2006), career advancement opportunities with a clear career progression (Mone & London, 2010; Seijts & Crim, 2006) and sufficient training opportunities (Mone & London, 2010; Crawford, 2006; Crawford, LePine & Rich, 2010) are all variables to engagement; however, there was little evidence of these topics having been discussed. There were no directions or questions guiding supervisors to discuss future opportunities with the employee or their professional development. Additionally, the conversation sheets did not have goals or feedback related to how the employee could develop or explore more opportunities within the organization. Overall, employees were not talking about their future within the organization and how the

organization or the supervisor might be willing to invest in their development for new job opportunities.

4.1.4 Feedback

Receiving ongoing feedback about their work from the supervisor is a variable of engagement (Bakker and Bal, 2010; Catteeuw et al., 2007; Christian et al., 2011; Macey et al., 2009; Matsui, Kakuyama, & Onglatco, 1987; Mone & London, 2010; Pulakos, 2004). The literature defines quality feedback as honest (Catteeuw et al., 2007), in real-time (Bakker & Bal, 2010), ongoing (Mone & London, 2010), and provided for individual performance as well as group performance (Matsui, Kakuyama, & Onglatco, 1987).

Unfortunately, the supervisor did not provide quality feedback during the conversations. For example, the conversation sheets generally lacked details, which made the goals vague or ambiguous, making it difficult to understand what was discussed in the actual conversation: “You grew professionally” or “Your communication has improved.” Likewise, the conversation sheets were absent of comments or dates for a follow-up goal setting session, meetings to receive feedback or an agreement about the role of ongoing feedback.

4.2 AR Cycle: Plan

Prior to our annual goal setting period, which began in December 2016, I was able to improve the goal setting process, update the forms, improve the training tools, and train the supervisors.

4.2.1 Goal Setting Method

During my literature review, I found articles that helped me see that the goal setting process was not anchored in a formal goal setting method. The initial goal setting process, created by the consultants, lacked a foundation grounded in the rigor of research with empirical evidence. I reviewed the performance management systems as discussed in Chapter 2 to determine which one may best fit the organization (Table 2.1).

Balanced Score Card focuses on quantifying every goal that is set, but this would not allow our organization to measure other important, non-quantifiable values. Similarly, the focus of Total Quality Management is on clearly measurable quality standards; however, my organization does not possess the ability to capture the quantifiable data for the quality of every service that we offer. Ultimately, I determined that Management By Objective (MBO) best aligned to our needs by allowing the freedom for the supervisor and the employee to define the objectives that are valuable to their own situation. This method lends itself well to a conversational approach to goal setting because it is designed to invite the employee to define

objectives while allowing the employee to negotiate the actions, deadlines, and goals (Tosi, Rizzo, & Carroll, 1970).

In this approach, employees would be invited to articulate their goals, propose methods to achieve their goals, and suggest when their goals would be accomplished, within the boundaries of the employee's role and job responsibilities. The core of MBO is to share the organization's goals so that the employee and organization are aligned with a common purpose (Drucker, 2007). By using MBO as our foundation, supervisors would also be able to determine what work needs to be done by each individual while tracking an employee's accomplishments (Mio et al., 2015). With these benefits in mind, I constructed the goal setting conversations to follow the principles of MBO.

4.2.2 Inputs to the Goal Setting Conversations

The information that was needed for a supervisor and employee to complete the goal setting session was found in business documents, such as the organization's current and past strategy, goals, and financial documents. To assist supervisors in preparing for the discussions, they had access to real-time sales results and the organization's annual goals. The goal setting sheets included:

1. Past goals - Employee performance goals from their last goal setting session and the results the employee achieved towards those goals.
2. Organizational Goals - The annual goals for growth, performance, operations, financials, and quality.

3. Divisional Goals - The division's contribution to the organization goals
4. Team Goals - These goals are achieved as a team and based on how well the team performs together.

The organization's goals are to be cascading goals (Kaplan & Norton 1996), which means the sum of the employee's goals equal the goals of the team, the team's goals add up to the goals of the division, and the division's goals add up to be the goals of the organization. In this model, it is the responsibility of the CEO and Board to define the goals, the leadership team to organize them by division and the supervisor to ensure that employees commit to achieving them.

For the goal setting process used in this project, the inputs were based on creating a clear understanding of the goals and direction of the organization (Mone & London, 2010; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003) and how the employee's contribution supported those goals (Crawford, 2006; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Seijts & Crim, 2006). To start this process, I created an organizational scorecard that defined the organization's goals for the year (financial, product, people, and quality) as outlined by our CEO and Board. The CEO shares the organization's goals with the executive team. Our four executives completed their goal setting sessions with our CEO. Then, the four executives completed goal setting sessions with the employees they supervised). Finally, all 88 employees completed their goal setting sessions with our supervisors; then, all submitted scorecards.

4.2.3 Goal Setting Conversations Sheets

The design of the goal setting process included cultural tools of the organization, which were designed by the same consultants who helped with the initial goal setting process. Our leaders, supervisors, and employees were comfortable using these tools to have conversations or make decisions because we actively used them in nearly all of our leadership and planning meetings. Examples of culture tools are the use of the drama triangle to manage conflict or five rotating hats to avoid groupthink. Specific to the culture of my organization, the goal setting conversation was organized around a model called AIM (attend, imagine, move), as described in Chapter 1, Table 1. We also used the organization's roadmap, asked the employee to reflect on Clarity, Atmosphere, and Talent (CAT) as they experienced them, and lastly discussed the employee's performance and potential using a 9-box grid.

Though specific references to AIM is not found in the literature, it does loosely reflect Simon's three stages of Rational Decision Making: Intelligence, Design, Choice (Augier & Feigenbaum, 2003). Where A corresponds with Intelligence gathering, I could connect to possible courses of action, and M deals with selecting a course (Augier & Feigenbaum, 2003). Seeing some alignment with AIM and the literature, added to the fact that this was the organizational system Auto Club favored, I arranged 32 engagement variables into the AIM structure.

Table 7 shows how I integrated the 32 engagement variables into the conversation sheets and includes a variety of actions for the supervisor to consider while completing the goal setting session, many recommended by Mone & London (2010).

Table 7 Goal Setting Session by Section and Content (Conversation Sheets)	
<p>Attend - <i>Listening and observing to understand the current reality fully</i></p> <p>In this section, the supervisor and employee examine current realities regarding the results of the organization, team, and individual. They review accomplishments from the last goal setting session, analyze, and reflect on the outcomes.</p>	
<p>Variables of Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There is ongoing feedback about the employee's work from his supervisor. ● There is a feeling of fairness within the organization. ● The employee sees himself as a part of the organization. ● The employee can see himself in the social construct. ● There is social support in the employee's teams. ● The employee trusts his supervisor. ● The employee's supervisor acts in his best interest. ● The employee is in the right work environment. ● There is a high level of trust exists within the organization. 	<p>Goal Setting Session Actions (Supervisor)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide recognition and help improve performance. ● Ask how successful the employee has been in achieving his goals. ● Ask the employee to reflect on his experience- enablers, and barriers. ● Share reasons for decisions, value ideas, and opinions, listen carefully and act on concerns and needs. ● Lead with fairness and respect. ● Ask for feedback about how fairly the employee feels she is being treated. ● Be trustworthy, giving consistent and authentic answers.

Imagine - *Developing options, possibilities and encouraging innovation*

The supervisor and employee brainstorm possibilities to identify measurable goals and objectives for the next performance period. They also discuss the goals of the organization, team goals, and personal goals. In addition, this section, the employee discusses resources by sharing what enablers are working well, what can be improved, and what is not working, as well as if any barriers are stopping him from reaching his goals.

- Variables of Engagement
- The employee understands the strategy, vision, and direction of the organization.
- The employee supports the goals, values, and beliefs of the organization.
- The employee embraces the belief values and goals of the organization.
- The employee can improve organizational productivity and processes.
- The employee can solve problems and can influence how work is done.
- The employee's work has task significance, variety, and the work is done with some level of autonomy.
- The employee is emotionally invested in his work (absorbed).
- The employee can express himself in his work.
- The employee's work is meaningful, useful, worthwhile, and challenging.
- The employee has new work opportunities.
- There are career advancement opportunities for the employee with a clear career progression – he can see a path forward.
- The organization supports the employee's development goals.

Goal Setting Session Actions

- Read the Mission Statement; ask how the employee feels about it.
- Help him, or her understand the mission and strategy of the organization and how his work supports the organizational goals.
- Show the Organizational Roadmap.
- Share how his work contributes to the overall goal of the organization.
- Value ideas and opinions, while listening carefully to needs and concerns.
- Encourage decision-making, as well as innovative and creative ideas to improve productivity or processes.
- Encourage ways to improve productivity and processes.
- Provide control over the quality of work.
- Discuss potential and performance (9 Box).
- Provide feedback on career aspirations; consider career development efforts, while discussing career planning and opportunities to develop.
- Ask what specific advancements or positions she finds interesting.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There are sufficient training opportunities for the employee. 	
<p>Move (agreement) - <i>Decide and act – these are the actions that will bring success.</i></p> <p>This is the section where the employee makes a commitment to what he will achieve and works with the supervisor to make a plan for how to achieve his goals for the next performance period.</p>	
<p>Variables of Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The employee is active in his role and connected to the is work. ● The employee has a personal presence and a level of energy for his work. ● The employee can identify with his work. 	<p>Goal Setting Session Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Listen to the employee’s emotional investment and energy in his personal brand statement, goals, and professional development. ● Share reasons for decisions, value ideas, and opinions, listen carefully and act on concerns and needs; lead with fairness and respect.
<p>Move (commitment) - Roadmap and Development Goals - <i>Commit to your performance goals.</i></p> <p>An agreement was written by the employee outlining the performance goals he or she commits to achieving during the next performance period</p>	
<p>Variables of Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The employee has confidence that he can accomplish his goals. ● There is a feeling of fairness within the organization. ● The employee has adequate resources to hit the goals. ● There are resources for the employee to do his job effectively. 	<p>Goal Setting Session Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Set goals that are actionable with deadlines. ● Share how these goals are possible. ● Provide the resources needed to be successful.
<p>Move (support) - Supervisor Agreements - <i>A commitment from the supervisor to support the employee’s goals</i></p> <p>How the supervisor can support the employee in completing his goals and what resources the employee needs to complete his goals successfully.</p>	

Variables of Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The employee trusts his supervisor. • The employee's supervisor acts in the employee's best interest. 	Goal Setting Session Actions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen carefully to needs and concerns. • Value opinions and ideas.
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We schedule these sessions to last between 60 and 90 minutes and to occur two or four times a year, depending on the complexities of the employee's job duties (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Catteeuw et al., 2007; Christian et al., 2011; Macey et al., 2009; Matsui, Kakuyama, & Onglatco, 1987; Pulakos, 2004). For example, a Regional Vice President may require four times a year to discuss quarterly goals, compared to a receptionist who could meet twice a year. The decision regarding an appropriate time range for these conversations was based on a desire to balance respect for participants' schedules with the time needed to ask the questions within the conversation.

I designed the goal setting sessions to incorporate feedback from past-performance and to create realistic goals for the upcoming performance period, as well as to cultivate a discussion about further development opportunities for the employee. Realistic goals are important in providing confidence to the employee in his or her ability to successfully reach their targets (Macey et al., 2009). Employee goals should be measurable and time-bound, and that they focus on the individual, team, and development results to meet the needs of our organization. These goals were specific and intended to improve the performance of the organization (Bezuijen et al., 2010). If the employee were a new employee, the first goal setting session would be focused on training, successfully completing the ramp up sales goals, and the new hire probationary

period. I intended to promote personal responsibility for the employee's contribution, during the goal setting conversation, to the organization (results), the team (total team results), and themselves (personal achievement). These three areas stemmed from the literature review and were meant to enhance personal investment (Kahn, 1990), team support (Macey et al., 2009), and impact to the organization (Crawford, 2006; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Seijts & Crim, 2006).

I adjusted the intent of the goal setting conversation to promote personal responsibility for the employee's contribution to the organization (results), the team (experience), and themselves (development). For example, we changed the team goals to be less product-oriented and more process-centered (Grant, 2012), focusing less on results and more on how the team works together (Macey et al., 2009). I also changed *personal development* to *professional development* with a focus on developing towards a new professional opportunity rather than developing a skill or taking a class (Mone & London, 2010; Crawford, 2006). The use of the term *personal development* led to employees setting goals to lose weight, run a marathon, or visit a foreign country, which are great personal goals, but not focused on development goals that the organization could directly support. In summary, I used the insights from the literature to update the conversation sheets with new questions constructed using the variables of engagement and added more detailed directions in the form.

4.2.4 Goal Setting Outcomes

From the variables above, a goal setting sheet was revised to provide a script, clearly defined expectations for each section, and the expectations for the employee's goals. Supervisors were provided a template and a model of what would be considered a purposeful, productive conversation to help define the expectations. The content of the outcomes was used to perpetuate the goal setting process, including conversation sheets, a performance scorecard, and supervisory agreements. These tools were used to capture details of the conversation and support the effort to monitor progress towards objectives (Drucker, 2007).

1. Goal Setting Conversations Sheets - four-page conversation script/form - A filled out conversation sheet, which is a record of the goal setting conversation and includes feedback. This sheet has the notes from the conversation.
2. Individual Scorecard – One-page scorecard - Individual performance goals, team performance goals, and employee development goals captured on a single sheet that can be placed in the employee's office and can be used to develop a performance scorecard.
3. Supervisor Agreements - Within the four-page conversations script/form - Specific agreements that the supervisor has made to support the employee in completing his goals and what resources the employee needs to complete his goals successfully.

These tools help the supervisor in providing ongoing feedback to the employee, a variable that is referenced multiple times in the engagement literature (Bakker and Bal, 2010; Catteeuw et al., 2007; Christian et al., 2011; Macey et al., 2009; Matsui, Kakuyama, & Onglatco,

1987; Pulakos, 2004). To ensure that these conversations would continue, I provided a space to record a date and time for the next goal setting session in the supervisor's and employee's calendars (Seijts & Crim, 2006). This step provided a time frame for goal completion, which was meant to create a clear expectation for the employee. I also included a schedule of when employees could expect to meet with their supervisors to discuss their scorecards, date and time for the supervisor to check in on performance and offer feedback, and a schedule to establish ongoing feedback. I included questions that focused on professional development, the purpose of which was to demonstrate the organization's investment in the employee's growth, a significant variable of engagement (Mone & London, 2010; Crawford, 2006).

4.3 AR Cycle: Diagnose and Plan Summary

When I started the AR cycle, I could quickly identify what did not work in the initial goal setting process, but it was not until I completed the literature review, redesigned the process, and trained the supervisors that I understood why the system did not deliver its intended outcomes. To redesign the process, I reflected on the deficiencies of the original structure, as stated above, and considered several possible options for improving these shortcomings (Table 8).

Table 8 Adjustments to Goal Setting Documents	
Deficiencies	Actions to Resolve

1) Supervisors were not provided with information to prepare for the conversations.	1. Identified, described and provided directions to supervisors for the inputs to the goal setting process.
2) The conversation sheet and scorecard forms lacked the direction that was needed to remind supervisors what was expected in answer to each question.	2. Redesigned the goal setting conversation sheets to include the variables of engagement from the literature and our organization's cultural tools.
3) Specific goals were not set during the goal setting sessions.	3. Identified, described and provided directions to supervisors for the outcomes to the goal setting process.
4) We did not integrate organizational information, such as the organization's goals, into the form to prompt supervisors to discuss how the employee fits into the success of the organization.	4. Redesigned the goal setting conversations sheets to include the variables of engagement from the literature and our organization's cultural tools.
5) There were no directions or questions guiding supervisors to discuss future opportunities or professional development with the employee or	5. Included questions and directions to help supervisors have conversations that included future opportunities for the employee.
6) The supervisors did not provide feedback that included measurements, dates, or specific action.	6. Identify, describe and provide directions to supervisors for the outcomes to the goal setting process.

After these deficiencies were addressed and I had time to reflect on the literature and our approach to goal setting, I realized that the initial goal setting process design was focused more on the steps of setting goals rather than how to use the goal setting conversations to engage the employees during the process. As a result, the process lacked the rigorous

foundation found in the literature and had questions that were underdeveloped to spur the answer they sought.

During this AR Cycle, I addressed these issues by returning to the literature to create a stronger tie to the evidence found by fellow researchers and to enhance our goal setting process. I displayed my findings in Table 3, where I share what the literature says about engagement and in Table 6, where I outline how we integrated those ideas into the goal setting process. I then used these revisions and insights to design supervisor training to revise and reset the goal and worked with our Human Resources and branding teams to brand the process, by using the colors, fonts, logos, and language from our brand playbook. Those teams worked with me to integrate my research, culture, and brand too with the goal to increase the adoption and the effectiveness of the new process, as stated above.

5. AR Cycle: Goal Setting Experience Actions and Observations

The assessment of the initial goal setting process revealed the issues of the goals setting process. The primary action for this AR Cycle, which occurred between November 2016 and March 2017, was to have all supervisors retrained on the goal setting process before our organization was setting goals for the 2017 year. November is the regular time for this activity and would be in-line with employees' expectations. The observations involved a pre-interview, a goal setting session, and a post-interview.

5.1 AR Cycle: Actions - Supervisor Training and Deployment

During the training on the revised goal setting session, I shared a summary of the key findings from the assessment, significant changes in the redesigned process, information from the literature that supported those changes, and instructions for completing the process with fidelity. I gave the supervisors the opportunity to ask clarifying questions, influence how they completed the process for their teams, and discuss the organizational goals surrounding the goal setting process. I shared the redesigned goal setting process and introduced the changes aimed at resolving these issues:

1. Supervisors did not prepare for the conversations.
2. The conversation sheet and scorecard forms lacked clarity in outlining for supervisors what is expected in answers to each question.
3. Specific goals are not set during the goal setting sessions.
4. We did not integrate organizational information, such as the organization's goals, into the form to prompt supervisors to discuss how the employee fits into the success of the organization.
5. There were no directions or questions guiding supervisors to discuss employees' future opportunities or professional development.
6. The supervisors did not provide quality feedback.

We outlined the inputs to the goal setting session and stressed the importance of reviewing relevant information for the goal setting conversations before meeting with the employee. Reviewing (before the employee and supervisor meet) the past goals of the employee, his or her performance towards those goals, the outcomes of the team goals and how the employee's results contributed to the organizational goals would allow the supervisor to discuss details in the feedback portion of the goal setting process. The idea of preparation is to give supervisors an opportunity to increase engagement by discussing how the employee's work contributed to the overall goals of the organization (Crawford, 2006; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Seijts & Crim, 2006) and by encouraging discussion aimed at increasing an employee's confidence in his or her abilities to accomplish their own goals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

During the training, I showed the embedded culture tools, as described in Chapter 4, of the organization in the conversation sheets and demonstrated how the supervisor should refer

to them during the conversations. Our culture tools focus on creating the right work environment for our organization. The point of putting them into the forms was to leverage the value of the tool and give the supervisor and the employee something to reference when sharing an idea or concern during the conversation. For example, using the 9-box grid to explain performance and potential provided a common language and therefore an increased level of clarity.

The outputs should capture the expectations of the required information in each. For example, the employee roadmaps included measurable goals related to employees' specific roles, key actions required to achieve those goals, and what professional development would support them in taking those actions. The goal setting conversations sheets, as described in Table 6, discussed all the variables of engagement and provided a means for the supervisor and employee to share their thoughts about the employee and the organization in the context of that engagement variable. During the training, we engaged in role-playing exercises to practice how this conversation could go, and I provided insights on what actions the supervisor could use during the conversations as described by Mone & London (2010). For example, how supervisors could ask for feedback from the employee or different ways to invite the employee to offer ideas on how to improve productivity.

The individual roadmaps are the place where the employee and supervisor could note agreement about the specific goals for the next performance period. Using insights from Bezuijen et al. (2010), I shared the expectations for specific, challenging goals. For example, "\$300,000 of new business sales" next year, which is a specific dollar in sales and would be a

challenge for a 2nd-year sales agent. Lastly, I presented the importance of maintaining high levels of trust within the organization, ways the supervisor could act in his employees' best interest and the specific value of supervisor agreements in building this trust as recommend by Macey et al. (2009) as well as Mone & London (2001).

The facilitator used a team commitment document for leaders to sign during the training, to align the team with our goals and our culture. The commitment signing was not a part of the training and was not an activity in which our leaders had previously participated; however, the CEO and consultant agreed that it would help in gaining buy-in from the leaders. After discussing working agreements with the team, we united around a document defining our commitment to the organization and our goals. When we, the CEO and executive leaders, walked in front of the group to sign the document, and say out loud, "I am in!" Although this activity was not my suggestion, it displayed our leaders' emotional engagement in the work, (Schaufeli et al., 2002) and commitment to the strategy and mission of the organization (Mone & London, 2011; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003), as well to each other as a team (Christian et al., 2011; Macey et al., 2009; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003).

5.2 AR Cycle: Observations - Data Collection

I conducted the interviews for this project following the protocol found in Appendix 2, using a semi-structured interview approach and follow-up questions, as described in Chapter 3. The pre-interviews were aimed at revealing information about the participant's past goal setting

experiences. Then, in the post-interview, the goal was to learn how each participant perceived the redesigned goal setting process. The recruitment and pre-interviews took place a month before the annual goal setting sessions. I conducted pre-interviews and post-interviews with 24 participants: three supervisors, five administrative staff, and 16 sales agents.

Volunteers interviews were one-on-one, in person or over the phone. In both cases, supervisors used private offices to conduct the interviews. There was a drawback to completing the interview over the phone, because of the lack of visual observations and personal interaction as well as the increased likelihood of potential distractions. However, I did not sense that phone interviews took away too much value from the conversations because there were no differences in length of the session, the number of ideas the participant offered, or details provided.

When I started the interviews, I shared the date, time, and participant number, followed by a series of questions. I scheduled 30 minutes for each pre-interview and found this to be enough time to complete the yes/no questions and ask follow-up questions. During the interview, I did not take notes; instead, I recorded the conversations, which allowed me to focus more fully on the participants' responses and therefore ask appropriate follow-up questions.

To start the interview, I explained that the research project aimed to improve the goal setting process and, beyond providing a high-level summary, I would not share my findings with anyone in the organization. I also asked the participant to focus on one supervisor when discussing his/her experience with goal setting. Lastly, before we started, I reminded the participant that I was recording the conversation and reminded each one that s/he could withdraw his or her participation at any time for any reason.

The intent was to schedule the post-interview to take place at once following the goal setting session, but I was rarely able to do that because of limitations of the employee's work schedule, as well as my own. However, I conducted all interviews within two weeks of the initial goal setting conversation.

The Human Resources department provided me with the conversation sheets and roadmaps for each of the participants, labeled with the participant's number. Like the assessment completed in the *diagnose* stage of the AR Cycle, I reviewed the documents and used notes to develop themes, which I captured on Post-it notes.

5.3 AR Cycle: Goal Setting Process Reflect

In this section, I explore what employees thought about their past goal setting sessions and how they experienced the redesigned goal setting process. I then interpret those results using the literature and consider potential next steps. The sub-headings in this section are: Past Goal Setting Process – the analysis of the pre-interviews, Redesigned Goal Setting Process – the analysis of the post-interviews, Relationship with Previous Research – tying back the analysis results to the literature, and finally Emerging Ideas – where I go deeper into some of the results.

I listened to the audio recordings and reviewed goal setting conversations sheets with employee roadmaps, as discussed in Chapter 3, to analyze results by identifying key themes. Listening to the interviews allowed me the time to reflect on what the participants shared while I reviewed their goal setting documents. It is important to note in this section where

percentages followed by (n=#) that I am not presenting a quantitative analysis or using quantitative calculations to show relationships. However, I am deviating from traditional Action Research methods to share data that demonstrates a change in a small population from pre-interviews and post-interviews and what lead me to ask deeper questions about specific responses. The yes-no results for pre-interviews and post-interviews, as well as the comparison metrics, are in Appendix 2, Tables 1-3.

5.3.1 Level of Engagement with the Organization's Work

5.3.1.1 Past Goal Setting Processes (Pre-Interview Results)

When I asked participants the question, in the pre-interviews about past goal setting experiences, if they were aware of and believed the mission/vision of the organization, only 33% (n=8) said that they knew the mission/vision statement, and 46% (n=11) shared that they believed in the mission/vision/motivation of the organization, some of which did not know the actual statement. I also asked if the participants knew the goals of that organization and only 8% (n=2) said that they did. The same 8% shared that they understood their role in helping achieve the goals of the organization.

5.3.1.2 Redesigned Goal Setting Process (Post-Interview Results)

In the post interviews, all participants, (n=24), shared that they understood the mission statement of Auto Club and believed in it. I am not surprised because in our organizational health surveys and internal communication our new mission statement is highly revered. The marketing department created the new brand by using focus groups with our members for insights and suggestions to establish what resonated to them. The result was a complete rebranding which focused on how our product was relevant and valuable to our customers. Like our customers, our employees also shared their excitement with our new brand. It was the highest score of our engagement survey and continuously came up in the interviews. I put the mission statement in the goal setting conversation for the supervisor to read and use to set the context for the organizational goals. During the post-interviews, 86% (n=21)) of participants shared that they remember discussing the mission statement during the goal setting session.

5.3.1.3 Relationship with Previous Research (Tie to Literature)

I asked participants if they knew the mission/vision of Auto Club and if they believed in the mission because a variable of engagement is that the employee understands the strategy, vision, and/or direction of the organization (Mone & London, 2010; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). All the participants, 100% (n=24) knew that our mission was to *prepare and protect*, which is a

phrase out of the full mission statement of Auto Club, and they answered yes when I asked if they believed in it. Participants shared “I believe in it [we prepare and protect],” and that they embrace the beliefs, values, and goals of the organization, which Macey et al. (2009) say will positively affect engagement.

5.3.1.4 Emerging Issues

The redesigned goal setting process, compared to pre-interviews, had a 54% (n=13) increase for participants believing in the mission/vision/motivation of the organization. Though other variables could account for this improvement, it is likely that the redesigned goal setting process also supported this improvement when the supervisors read the mission as a context to set goals contributed to the gain. Participants also shared that 86% (n=21) more of them knew the goals of the organization and the same 86% (n=21) shared that they understood their role in those goals. Although I was not surprised, I was pleased that all the participants could recite a shortened version of our mission statement which was to “*prepare and protect.*” Participants shared “that is what we do here” or “we believe in what we are doing.” I missed the opportunity to ask why some of the participants left their former organization, which depending on their responses could have allowed me task follow-up questions about any connection between their leaving and feeling disconnected from their former company's mission/vision.

I would recommend that if an employee does not embrace the beliefs, values, and goals of the organization, then the goal setting process is an appropriate time to discuss why and how

to resolve that issue. The goal setting conversation is also an opportunity for a supervisor to discuss if this is the right organization for that employee to be highly engaged. There is an opportunity for our organization to reword its goals in a way that reflects the mission of our organization and by doing so, keeps the mission in front of the employee as they consider their goals. In this recommendation, the organization would have a defined and shared mission statement, but it would also phrase its goals using the words of the mission statement. For example, instead of “writing 20 quotes a week” the goal could be “share new products with 20 families a week to help them make sure their family is protected.” Additionally, based on these results, I also see an opportunity for our organization to use the mission statement as a foundation for our recruitment and selection process to spur engagement in the mission before their supervisor asks them to set goals. This is one example of how we can take this variable of engagement beyond the goal setting process.

5.3.2 Level of Engagement with the Individual’s Work.

5.3.2.1 Past Goal Setting Processes (Pre-Interview Results)

Employees who worked with their supervisor in the past to set goals would likely have had a chance to share their ideas about how to work through the goal setting conversations, which would invite them to engage in their individual work goals. A majority of the commonly used goal setting and performance evaluation tools, participants told me they used, included an

opportunity for employees to share their thoughts. Of the 13 participants who completed goal setting in the past, 92% (n=12) shared that they shared their thoughts during the goal setting process. For example, an employee could suggest how he would accomplish his goals and what tools he would use.

However, in a follow-up question, 54% (n=13) of the participants said that their supervisor assigned them goals. Of participants who had assigned goals 25% (n=6) also believed they had a voice during the goals setting process. In fact, of the 46% of participants who said that they knew their goals in the past, 92% (n=22) felt that it was possible to have ownership over the goal setting process even if their supervisor assigned goals. In other words, it stands to reason that if only a quarter of those who had goals assigned felt their voice was heard that allowing employees to participate more fully in selecting their own goals may increase their ownership of their goals.

I asked questions with the intent to learn if the employee agreed with, "I am engaged in the work I do." These questions focused on the employee's emotional investment in his or her work and the degree to which they felt their work was meaningful, useful, worthwhile and challenging. When I asked the participants if they were engaged in the past, only 50% (n=12) said yes. When I asked the participants what engagement meant to them, the following responses, although not all the responses, tied to the literature (Table 9).

Table 9 Participant's Meaning of Engagement	
Participants' Responses	Variable of Engagement from the Literature
"When I can make a difference."	They know the work they do contributes to the overall goal of the organization. Their work is worthwhile (Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010; Kahn, 1990; Seijts & Crim, 2006).
"When I want to set my goals higher."	They can improve organizational productivity and processes (Seijts & Crim, 2006; Mone & London, 2010).
"When I receive feedback."	There is ongoing feedback about their work from their supervisor (Bakker and Bal, 2010; Catteeuw et al., 2007; Christian et al., 2011; Macey et al., 2009; Matsui, Kakuyama, & Onglatco, 1987; Mone & London, 2010; Pulakos, 2004).
When "I am focused on the long term."	They understand the strategy, vision, and/or direction of the organization (Mone & London, 2010; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003).
When "I have a passion for doing better."	They can solve problems (Macey et al., 2009); Mone & London, 2010; Seijts & Crim, 2006).
When "I am able to give 100% to what I am doing."	They are emotionally invested in their work (absorbed) (Christian et al., 2011; Kahn, 1990; Macey et al., 2009; Saks & Gruman, 2014)

5.3.2.2 Redesigned Goal Setting Process (Post-Interview Results)

During the post-interviews, 100% (n=24) agreed that they had a voice during the goal setting conversation, and 92% (n=22) said that they set their own goals because of the

conversation. One participant shared, "I talked the whole time, and I picked my goals." As a response to the last question of the survey, 100% (n=24) responded that they were engaged in their goals, up from 50% when asked about past goal setting sessions. Many participants responded by saying "yes" when I asked if they were engaged in their goals, meaning they were engaged in the work required to complete their goals successfully. When I asked how they knew, they responded, "I care about what I do," "these are *my* goals, and I want to achieve them," and "I want to be here, and I want to make a difference."

5.3.2.3 Relationship with Previous Research (Tie to Literature)

I was surprised that the participants shared that they felt that it was possible to have ownership of the goal setting process even if their supervisor assigned goals. It appears that employees, at least some 67% (n=16), like to receive direction from their supervisor in the context of their position's expected goals. Even the employees who were told what their goals were, 8% (n=2), shared that they were engaged in their goals. Others shared "Yes, we set selling goals, but I could pick how much and how to do [accomplish] them" and "I liked that she helped me choose my goals, it gave me confidence that I was going to right direction." A desire to receive goals relative to the employee's position is a crucial finding, although this was a small sample size, considering the importance of an employee expressing himself or herself in their work found in the literature (Kahn, 1990; Mone et al., 2011; Saks & Gruman, 2014; Schaufeli et

al., 2002). I suggest looking deeper into this possibility in future research. Although this idea to not represent the participant's engagement while working, it does demonstrate their engagement in setting goals for their work, which I would suggest is a start towards engagement. That an employee would be assigned goals and still report being engaged in his work means that it is likely that an organization can cascade its goals, as discussed in chapter two, to employees and without negatively impacting their engagement.

The literature supports the participants' reflections about engagement in Table 9. Employees may describe engagement differently than the authors of engagement theory or even different from each other, but they share the same essence of engagement as represented in the literature, which is to invest themselves in their work.

5.3.2.4 Emerging Issues

The redesigned goal setting process, compared to participants past goal setting experiences, had an improvement from 21 % (n=5) to 92% (n=22) for participants believing they set their own goals, from 42% (n=10) to 100% (n=24) for participants believing they had a voice during the conversation and from 50% (n=12) to 100% (n=24) when I asked of the participant was engaged in their goals. Participants shared, "I felt like I did all the talking and I came up with my goals," "I feel like I was controlling the process," and "the goals were all my idea." In these two comments, participants are sharing that they had a voice and felt like they had the opportunity to set their own goals, showing voice and ownership of the employee.

As shown in the conversation sheet design, we invited the employees to talk about more than just their goals, by inviting the employees to make more choices in how they accomplish their work. A supervisor and employee can talk about how the employee will accomplish their work, the pace of the work and how they will need to improve themselves to continue to grow. For example, a supervisor could ask: “What is the best way for you to do that?” “What can help you?” or “How can I help?” Employees want to be involved in the goal setting process, share their opinions and feel confident they are supported. Some participants shared “I felt supported to get more training,” “I was able to share my ideas,” and “I liked that we talked about what I was going to do.”

Since 100% (n=24) of the employee set goals within the context of their position and the organization, it suggests that an organization can cascade its goals to employees without negatively impacting the employee’s engagement, I would want to know more about the impact of cascading goals. The ways our organization cascades goals work for our type of work and work environment, but there may be a better way to assign goals. What are alternative methods to cascade goals? Is there a way to make a more significant impact on engagement? Is there a way to have employees commit to higher goals that they believe are still possible? I recommend future research to understand these questions and how they change from industry to industry or product to product.

In this section, I shared: Results about the employee’s setting their own goals, having a voice, and their level of engagement in those goals. How we gave employees more choices on how they achieve their goals, involve them in a conversation about their goal, and offer them

support — lastly, how we cascade goals today and the possibility to improve our method for the organization. Engagement with the individual's work, as discussed in this section, can be supported by these activities and can be improved as we learn from our employees and goal setting process feedback.

5.3.3 Synergy Between Employee and Organization

5.3.3.1 Past Goal Setting Processes (Pre-Interview Results)

One of the themes that emerged in the literature and the interviews was how the work environment, as discussed in chapter two, impacted the employee's engagement and his or her goals, which I am calling synergy between the employee and the organization. Participants (42%, n=10) shared that they like to know the overall goals of the organization and how their goals contribute to its overall success. More than half, 54% (n=13), said that they did not know the goals of others. "I don't even know the goals of my supervisor," and "I didn't know what my coworkers were doing." Moreover, 92% (n=22) of participants said that they did not know their organization's goals when I asked, saying, "I didn't know the mission of the organization." When an organization does not share its goals, it is likely that there is a disconnect in what employees want to know and what the organization shares. As shared above, the employee's wanting to know what the organization is trying to accomplish and when they do not know the organizational goals it creates a disconnect in the sense that employee's do not know what direction the organization is going or what possible action is priorities above another. If an

organization shared its goals, then employee have more information to make decisions and to set their own goals.

When I asked more about team goals, 54% (n=13) of participants shared that they had team goals, and only 4% (n=1) said they could not impact the performance towards those goals. Two of the other 46% (n=11) that did not have team goals shared that they “don’t need to know what my peers are held to (their goals), but it would be nice to know what is expected of them (others on my team)” and “I wish I knew more about what everyone was doing.” Participants shared that when they did not know their teammates’ goals or have team goals, they felt like everyone “was doing their own thing” and they were not working towards anything together.

When I asked probing follow up questions, employees shared that “feeling heard” increased their sense of belonging to the organization. “What I like the most is when they (the organization) are willing to hear me say, *Can we try this?*” Only 42% (n=10) of participants felt like they belonged to the organization when asked in the pre-interviews. Participants who appeared not to feel connected to the organization made comments like these, “I didn’t feel like I knew what was going on” and “you could say it until you were blue in the face, but things would remain the same.” These comments suggest that when a participant does not feel like the organization listens to them, they become frustrated and feel isolated from the organization.

Many of the participants, 67% (n=18), shared they did not have the resources to do their jobs. “We did not even have the inventory on site to meet our booking goals” and “our computers did not work a lot of the time, so we wasted time waiting.” The lack of resources slowed down the performance of the employees because they did not have the resources

needed to do their job. If an employee does not have the required resources to accomplish the tasks of their job, then they will also have a limited ability to achieve their goals, thus reducing their confidence they can successfully meet their goals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

I asked the participants to tell me about their relationship with their supervisor in the past. Although I had a variety of responses, 38% (n=9) were generally positive, 46% (n=11) negative, and 17% (n=4) were neutral or indifferent. Positive responses included words such as “supportive,” “cared about my success,” “in a friendly way,” and “challenged me.” Negative responses about an employee’s relationship with their supervisor had words such as “they were distant,” “absent,” “I didn’t see them much,” “I was not a priority,” and “they cared only about the numbers.” Some of the responses were hard to determine if they were positive or negative, so I recorded them as neutral, such as “okay,” “fine,” “I talked to them now and again, but they were nice,” and “gave me time when I asked for it.” These responses impact the synergy between employee and organization through the relationship with their supervisor.

5.3.3.2 Redesigned Goal Setting Process (Post-Interview Results)

After the new process, 71% (n=17) of participants told me that the new goal setting process changed their perception of their work environment. The participants who knew the organizational goals moved from 8% (n=2) to 92% (n=22), there was the same increase of 86% for participants that understood their role towards those goals. “Yes, I know how my goals help the company” and “I can see how my sales are a part of the overall sales results” were two

comments. There was also an increase of 21% of responses that said the employee could influence how work was completed in the organization. One participant shared, “I liked that I was asked how I could help make the office better.” All the participants had team goals and, 92% (n=22) believed they could impact the performance of those goals. They added comments such as: “I like it when the team is going for our goals together,” “we all helped each other, I felt good about the work environment,” and “we are going to work together to hit our goals.” There was a 21% increase in employee’s who felt like they could influence how to do work in the organization from 75% (n=18) to 96% (n=23). I asked each participant if they had the resources, they needed to meet their goals, and those who responded yes went from 33% (n=8) to 100% (n=24), and they had supervisor agreements indicating which resources the supervisor would provide in their goal setting sheets.

When I asked about their relationship with their supervisor participants shared “my supervisor committed to helping me hit my goals,” “I feel like she believes in me,” and “I know she will help me.” Participants, 33% (n=8), revealed that this process had changed their relationship with their supervisor from negative or neutral to positive. On the other hand, 67% (n=16) participants shared that their relationship has not changed because of the new process.

5.3.3.3 Relationship with Previous Research (Tie to Literature)

According to the literature engagement improves if the employee is in the right work environment (Bakker and Bal, 2010; Catteeuw et al., 2007; Christian et al., 2011; Kahn, 1990;

Macey et al., 2009; Matsui, Kakuyama, & Onglatco, 1987; Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Pulakos, 2004). The redesigned goal setting process includes a way to gain a better understanding of what makes the right work environment for employees. The participants shared that they want to know the goals of the organization and the team to feel connected to the organization. The literature says that employees who take the goals of the organization as their own have a sense of ownership of the organization (Macey et al., 2009). By putting the goals of the organization into the goal setting documents, it was easy for the supervisor and the employee to discuss the goals of the organization when determining the goals of the employee. Included in the goal setting process is a way to identify and commit to team goals. Employees can set goals as a team and share them using a roadmap that can be seen by their peers. These steps help participants to feel included in what was happening around them. The intent was to help the employee to see themselves in the social construct of the organization (Kahn, 1990; Gebauer & Lowman, 2009; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). An employee also needs to feel like they can improve the organization to be engaged in their work (Seijts & Crim, 2006; Mone & London, 2010). This process encourages employees, using a conversation, to share their ideas on how to improve not only their work but also how the team and organization work together.

There need to be adequate resources for an employee to feel like he can do his or her job efficiently and hit their goals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010; Kahn, 1990; Mone & London, 2010). Although we cannot solve all our organization's resource limitations, the intention of supervisor agreements is to decide on what resources are available and when. The supervisor can make an impact on the goal setting process, and the employee's

relationship with their supervisor also impacted engagement. Some of the participants shared that their relationship with their supervisor has changed because of the communication, clarity, and commitments made during the goal setting conversation. However, sixteen participants shared that their relationship has not changed because of the new process, revealing that a majority of the time establishing a relationship with your supervisor happens outside of this conversation. Supervisor need to act in their employee's best interest (Macey et al., 2009; Mone & London, 2010), consistently and not only during goal setting sessions.

5.3.3.4 Emerging Issues

Listening to the participants share about the goal setting conversations, I was able to learn about what they want in their work environment, such as they "like to receive feedback," "see [their] progress to [their] goals" and they liked "working as a team towards goals." The goal setting conversation was useful in providing an opportunity for the employee to share their thoughts about the work environment. They shared "I felt supported to get more training," "the feedback went both ways," and "we all helped each other, I felt good about the work environment." The steps in the process, including questions about the work environment, provided insights on organizational goals, team goals, sharing goals, how to improve how to do work, what resources they need and how the supervisor can support the goals of the employee.

I want to improve how we learn want makes the right work environment. Examples of what can make the right work environment are social support, feedback, task variety,

participation in decision-making, professional development, and job control. What blend of mission, vision, culture, support, and outcomes make an environment right for the employee's to be successful in the context of the organization's intentions? The research uses connection, career, clarity, convey, congratulate, contribute, control, collaborate, credibility, and confidence (Seijts & Crim, 2006) as examples to create the right work environment. In our process, I used alignment (create shared clarity), bench strength (build capacity) and coordinate action (get it done) to talk about the work environment that best meets the needs of Auto Club. I would like to learn more about the impact of creating a work environment that prioritizes the needs of the organization, compared to building one that prioritizes the needs of the employee. In other words, create a work environment that supports the performance of the organization and find employees who thrive in that environment, compared to trying to make an environment that accommodates as many employees as possible, even if they do not perform well.

As much as I learned about the participants' relationship with their supervisor, there is so much more to learn. I suggest a way to continue to improve the goal setting process is the learn more about the supervisor and employee relationship. I was unable to gain a deep understanding of how they build trust, how the supervisor demonstrates they are acting in the employee's best interest and how to create a feeling of fairness in our organization. If we can continue to learn about these dynamics, we could use them in the goals setting process and other organizational methods, such as pre-onboarding, onboarding, training, and even disciplinary process.

5.3.4 Performance Feedback

5.3.4.1 Past Goal Setting Processes (Pre-Interview Results)

One of the themes that emerged from the interviews was feedback about performance. When I surveyed the conversation sheets, created by the consultants, from the initial goal setting sessions, they lacked details that would help a reader understand the discussion of the actual conversation. For example, “You grew professionally” or “Your communication has improved.” The feedback in the sheets also lacked numbers that defined what the employees’ goals were. For example, “You hit your numbers” or “You improved your performance.” In some of the sheets, the spaces for those questions were blank, with no answer or explanation. I also noticed that the conversation sheets did not discuss how the employees met their goals during the past performance period. For example, what went well, what got in the way or what needed to change? I expected this because, at this time, many employees did not set goals, and would not have past goals to discuss during the conversation.

When I asked participants about if they had ongoing feedback about their performance in the past 50% (n=12) said yes. An example of the participant's comments are “I do not feel like a part [of the organization] with feedback only once a year,” “the feedback was so generic,” and “the feedback was only about numbers.” In many of the interviews, 96% (n=23), the participants either wanted more feedback in the past or they liked getting feedback.

5.3.4.2 Redesigned Goal Setting Process (Post-Interview Results)

I looked at the conversations sheets after participants completed the redesigned goal setting process and found a significant improvement in the feedback provided. The feedback was specific, on 92% (n=22) of the conversation sheets, to what the employee did well during the past performance period. For example, “you did a good job of blocking your calendar so that you could make outbound calls” and “I noticed that you got up from your desk more to help members (customers) at the counter, which increase your membership sales and helped us reach our branch membership goal.”

The conversation sheets had a space to copy and paste the employees’ roadmap from their last goal setting session. Although the feedback notes did not have numbers in them, 88% (n=21) of the sheets did have the roadmap in the document and the following feedback referenced the employees’ goals stated in their roadmap. “I can see that you went over your call by 6%” and “You were able almost to double your call volume” were two examples. Earlier that year, our organization created online scorecards outside of the goal setting process. These were different from the scorecards used in the initial goal setting process as they were results not just stated goals. Employees’ goals, from their roadmaps, are added to those digital scorecards, and they can see their performance towards their goals. The scorecard provided feedback daily and was an effective way of providing ongoing feedback about an employee’s progress towards their sales goals. Many employees appreciate the real-time scorecards, with 33% (n=8) saying “I like

that I can see my goals every day.” The digital scorecards show progress towards their goals and may encourage confidence that the employee can accomplish their goals.

The conversation sheets had only a few questions left blank. Most of the blanks were in the section where the conversation was about the employee’s performance and potential in the context of promotability. For these questions, comments were vague and lacked specific feedback and direction that the supervisor and employee discussed. In this section, only 25% (n=6) identified potential promotions on their conversation sheets, which we explore more in the following section.

In the redesigned process we tried something that we had not tried as an organization before. We added in a section that asked for the employee to give supervisor feedback. We did this by inviting the employee to provide feedback and comments on how well the supervisor fulfilled the supervisor agreements from the last session and a work environment checklist to share details about specified areas in the work environment. One participant said, “I like that this process allows me to give my supervisor feedback, and she listened.” Just under half, 42% (n=10), of the participants specific referenced that they enjoyed the opportunity to provide feedback to their supervisor about how they managed and feedback about the organization.

5.3.4.3 Relationship with Previous Research (Tie to Literature)

Clearly, the goal setting sessions of the past, that are absent of any feedback make it unlikely the employees improved their performance. The same is true of vague, overgeneralized

feedback; a lack of specificity in discussing strengths and areas for growth will have little effect on his or her productivity and overall level of engagement (Bezuijen et al., 2010). In the redesigned process the participants that reported that they received feedback on their goals increased from 50% (n=12) to 100% (n=24). The increase of feedback confirms that the forms were beneficial in its directions and questions intended to provide feedback from the supervisor to the employee. The feedback included insights on individual performance and how the team performed together as suggested by Matsui, Kakuyama, and Onglatco (1987). As recommend by Mone et al. (2011), the conversation sheets also included recognition. The employees received specific feedback on their performance goals, which is useful for providing a connection between the employee and the organization by improving productivity, gaining new insights on their work, support for their future performance and engagement.

5.3.4.4 Emerging Issues

There was a date to follow up for the next conversation about how the employee was working towards their goal on 88% (n=21) of the roadmaps for when the supervisor and the employee were going to meet again. Planning follow-up meetings show that the process, or at least the conversation, was going to continue. Participates shared that they “didn’t like getting feedback only once a year” in the past, and “I like to know what is happening around the company,” or “I wish I knew more about what everyone was doing.” However, goal setting conversations, even if held quarterly, are not sufficient at providing ongoing feedback and they

are not frequent enough to keep employees informed on what is happening around them (Mone & London, 2010). Quality feedback on performance may qualify for ongoing, but it does not meet the standard of real-time feedback. Real-time feedback about performance with an employee's supervisor can positively impact their engagement in the same week, but when employees receive feedback that helps them develop in their role, their supervisors can positively impact their engagement in weeks to follow (Bakker & Bal, 2010). Organizations need another method to provide real-time feedback and should not rely on an annual or quarterly process.

As I reviewed the goal setting documents, supervisors did not consistently leverage a conversation about the strengths and weaknesses of the employee to enhance their feedback to the employees. Whereas the participants shared, I am engaged "when I receive feedback," "I liked getting specific feedback on my goals," and "I have a passion to do better." When supervisors did provide feedback, they focused on the strengths and not the weaknesses of the employee. The feedback that includes both an employee's strengths and weaknesses has been demonstrated as provides a connection to higher engagement (Catteeuw et al., 2007). By not discussing the employee's weaknesses, the employees do not have the opportunity to use single or double loop learning, as described by Raelin (2003), to improve their performance or to gain more profound insights into what is next for them. I regret that I did not ask the participants how they thought or felt about the feedback they received or provided during the conversation. During the pre-interviews, 50% of participants said they received feedback in the past, and 50% said they were engaged in their goals. During the post-interviews, after 100% of the participants

received feedback, 100% of participants said they were engaged. I missed the opportunity to learn more about how feedback during the goal setting process impacted the participants.

5.3.5 Goal Setting Process

5.3.5.1 Past Goal Setting Processes (Pre-Interview Results)

My first question in pre-interviews was if the employee participated in a goal setting session in the past. If they answered yes, I asked about the overall experience of their past goal setting sessions. I was not surprised to learn that 58% (n=13) of participants reported that they did not set goals in the past, saying things like, “I didn’t know what was expected of me.” When I asked how they knew their goals, participants said that the tasks assigned to the position. “I just took what I sold the year before and added a little.” A few participants, 29% (n=7), shared those goal setting sessions were the same every year. In sum, during the pre-interviews, goal setting seemed to have been a vague process, with little clarity, similar to the analysis from the earlier versions of goal setting described in Chapter 4.

5.3.5.2 Redesigned Goal Setting Process (Post-Interview Results)

In the post-interviews, I asked how participants experienced the new goal setting process to answer one of the research questions: How would the employees respond to a goal setting process constructed with variables of engagement? Most of the participants, 63% (n=15) shared

that the session went “well.” They said the process was engaging; felt that their supervisor helped them through the conversation, stated that they were clear on the expectations or felt liked they worked well together with their supervisor to set goals. “I felt like I did all of the talking” compared to the Supervisor dominating the conversation as they have in the past. Additionally, 75% (n=18) of participants reported that the process felt interactive, describing their supervisors as “helpful” and willing to offer advice. These respondents said there were “open lines of communication,” their supervisor was engaged the whole time, or that their supervisor “believed in them.” Most participants, 58% (n=13), told me they had the opportunity to share their opinion of what their goals should be. “I like the questions [of the goal setting conversation]. My supervisor asked me what I wanted my goals to be.” The participants’ responses show that the goal setting process can influence the conversations between supervisor and employee, while participants had a positive response, although they could also have been telling me what I wanted to hear. Nevertheless, the guided conversations indeed developed participation, a necessary precursor, or element of engagement.

5.3.5.3 Relationship with Previous Research (Tie to Literature)

As I explored in Chapter 2, many organizations rarely see their performance management process achieve its intended purpose (Pulakos & O'Leary, 2011). Our organization is no different. Using goal setting, as the performance management process, to manage performance and to align the organization and employees’ goal was effective. This process provided a method to

improve the feedback supervisors gave to their employees, as suggested by London (2003). It has also provided a way to gain a deeper understanding of the work environment, recommend by Saks and Gruman (2011). Lastly, the process can be used to increase the communication and strengthen the relationships between the employee and their supervisor (Pulakos & O'Leary, 2001), and to facilitate the employee's performance rather than trying to manage it (Das, 2003).

5.3.5.4 Emerging Issues

Although measuring and tracking performance is outside of the scope of this research project, this process has successfully used several aspects of the literature show how to improve performance. Participants told me that they enjoyed this process a shared how it was a better experience than they have had in the past. "That [the conversation] went really well," "the conversation gave me a better understanding of why I had these goals," and "I was engaged in the process."

Saks & Gruman (2001) share that performance management processes have become overly complicated with a multitude of tools, paperwork, and steps, which become overly burdensome and therefore ineffective. I suspect that this process would be vulnerable to the same issues over time. The tools and steps make sense to our organization today in the context of our journey over the past three years, but when our current leadership team has moved on, these tools may lose their relevance. There is also no way, today, to know which steps the most effective or which tools within have the most significant impact. I propose that future

development of this process would be to simplify it. Reduce the steps, tools, and variables of engagement to those that have the most impact.

5.3.6 Goals and Goal Attainability

5.3.6.1 Past Goal Setting Processes (Pre-Interview Results)

The themes that emerged for goals from the conversation sheets and interviews were that goals were personal, challenging and measurable. In the pre-interviews, before the participants experienced the redesigned process, the participants shared their past experience with goal setting. Many participants shared that their goals were not personal. Of the 75% (n=18) of employees that knew their goals in the past, 94% (n=17) said that their goals were only numerical sales targets. A common concern in the interviews is that the participants liked it when their goals were about more than their sales targets, but also about their personal development or leadership. In fact, participants shared negative emotions when their goals were only numbers.

Two responses about numbers, 8% (n=2), shared such strong negative emotions, I wanted to acknowledge their comments: “I work hard, and those numbers are not everything I do for our members (customers).” The other shared: “I am more than just numbers. We are humans; don’t treat us like numbers.” I interpreted the participant's response as referencing a number in the sense of a sales goal, but more like an expression regarding being valued. In my

words “I am a person, not a number. A real human, not data.” Some of the comments about the goals were not personal, 17% (n=4). “My goals were not as personal as I would like my goals to be.”

Participants wanted their goals to be challenging. Some of the comments about their goals being challenging from their past were: I made it (my goals) on my own, 21% (n=5); they (my goals) were not feasible, 25% (n=6); or my goals were too low, 17% (n=4). In some cases, the employee sounded disengaged because the goals were too hard, and, in other examples, they sounded disengaged because they thought they could offer more. Thus, it seems vital to pay attention not only to set realistic goals, but also goals that are personal and meaningful to the individual. I was surprised to hear that all the respondents said they were successful meeting their goals in the past, although 75% (n=18) shared they did not know their goals. When I circled back to clarify how employees could achieve goals if they were unsure what their goals were, and had no way of measuring progress, they responded with statements such as: “I mean I did my job,” “I knew what I was supposed to do, and I did it.” These comments lead me to believe participants accept what their goals should be for their job.

5.3.6.2 Redesigned Goal Setting Process (Post-Interview Results)

A survey of the goal setting documents after the redesigned process, revealed that the sales goals were consistent in terms of what product was sold by position and the goal of how much to sell was relative to years of experience of that employee, but their team and

development goals were personal from one employee to the next. Those development goals included sales training, learning customer service skills and leadership activities. I will discuss the personalized goals for the individual's needs and professional development in the following sections. Moreover, 100% (n=24) roadmaps included goals were more than numbers; they were also about the employee's team goals, future actions, and development, as well as personalized for the participants.

In the post-interviews, 88% (n= 21) affirmed that their goals were challenging and of that 33 % (n=8) of participants shared "but possible." "I liked that we (the supervisor and employee) found new ways I could write more (sell more business)." The process provided an opportunity for the employee and supervisor to discuss what was challenging and how their goals could change to be possible. "My goals were clear and measurable." The goals written in this process, compared to the past, were specific and measurable. When I reviewed the employee roadmaps after their goal setting sessions, the sum of all the employee goals, including those who participated in the interviews, added up to 97% of the organization's sales goals which was a significant improvement over 66% from the prior year's goals.

Participants from the interviews shared that goals need to be more than just numbers. Goals also need to be challenging and personalized to the employee's performance, be meaningful and include professional development. Goals also need to be clear and measurable. An underlying theme is a tension between the individual's goals and the goals of the organization. Goals need to be specific to the individual, but their goals need a clear link to the goals of the organization.

5.3.6.3. Relationship with Previous Research (Tie to Literature)

An effective way to make an employee's work meaningful, useful, worthwhile and challenging, as described in the literature, is to make the employee's goals personal. The management by objective and conversation structure of this process was effective in giving the employee an opportunity to personalize their goals. A participant's perception of their goals is stronger when they can set the goals themselves (Leotti et al., 2005, referencing, Bandura & Wood, 1989). The tension between the employee's goals and the organization's goals is that if the sum of the employee's goals exceeds the organization's, the organization has a better chance to reach its goals. Employee's having a portion of the organizational goals means that employees only have a limited ability to impact what their performance goals will be in their roles. Although there is a strain between employee goals and the goals of the organization, participants did not mind setting goals within the context of the organization's goals, as discussed above.

The participants revealed excitement when they said their goals were challenging but possible. The literature says that challenging goals will trigger personal growth (Crawford, LePine & Rich, 2010), and goals that promote professional growth can positively impact engagement (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Moreover, engagement is higher when an employee's work is challenging (Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010; Kahn, 1990; Seijts & Crim, 2006). If an organization intends to grow, then it is reasonable to assume that employees will need to continue to set stretch goals and will require future development to achieve those goals. By

putting development goals into the goal setting conversation, the employees have an opportunity to share what development they need to continue to meet their goals, thus increasing their ability to commit to higher goals.

Goals also need to be specific and measurable (Bezuijen et al., 2010) and the employee must have confidence they can accomplish the goals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), but employee goals need to align with organizational goals. If employees are not aware of their goals, it is difficult to hold them accountable and if they do not have goals to work toward it undermines their sense of purpose (Drucker, 2007). Without measurable goals, it is difficult for an employee to measure their performance, and if no employees have measurable goals that they are aware of, then it is more difficult to measure if an organization is on track to make its goals. When every employee has measurable goals, and those goals add up to meet the goals of the organization, then the organization has a better method to understand its performance and progress towards its goals.

5.3.6.4. Emerging Issues

Several things went well in the redesigned goal setting process. The employees who shared they were the ones who choose their goals compared to their supervisor assigning their goals rose from 21% (n=5) to 92% (n=22), "The goals were all my idea," and "I felt like I did all the talking and I came up with my goals." Although I missed the opportunity to ask if the participants thought their goals were personal to them, a review of the goals from the

employee's roadmaps revealed that goals were unique from one individual to the next, and 97% (n=22) had development goals defined. Many of the participants, 88% (n=21), shared that their goals were challenging and 92% (n=22) thought they had the resources to complete those goals. They shared "my goals are challenging, but reachable" and "yes, I will have everything I need to accomplish my goals." All the participants, 100% (n=24), had specific, measurable performance goals recorded on their roadmaps. Nearly all of the participants, 92% (n=22), shared with me that supervisor showed them the organizational goals during the conversation and 96% (n=23) knew their own goals, up from 8% (n=2) and 75% (n=18) respectively. Because of the redesigned process, goals were more personal, challenging and measurable.

There are a few aspects that did not go as well as I would like: I missed the opportunity to ask if the participants thought their goals were personal and meaningful to them and gained more perspective. I also did not ask if the employee had confidence that they could accomplish their goals and what contributed or eroded to that confidence. Most of the performance goals for the participants, 88% (n=21), and the team, 75% (n=18), were measurable, but they did not all have due dates, 50% (N=12) or a precise definition of done (what success is in that goal), 58% (n=14). For example, "sell \$230,000 of DWP (direct written premium - new business)" compared to, "sell an average of \$19,200 of DWP a month or \$230,000 this year." Only 25% (n=6) identified potential promotions on their conversation sheets, which was disappointing because that was a consideration in the process design. The question about possible promotions within the conversation sheets was often left blank, as described above.

The individual development of employees is still in tension with the organizational goals, not just that the goals are personal, but also how those goals connected to their development in the organization and how their goals will expand over the years as the organization continually set higher goals. At some point, there is diminishing returns of investing in task work development, as opposed to knowledge work, where the investment in development does not support the increase of employee goals that follow. For example, the Auto Club's customer satisfaction score is 88%. To raise that score to 90% it would cost an estimated \$1 million more in investment to see a marginal rise in retention of customers, whereas the same amount invested in marketing would see a much higher return in new customers. Goals for task work that are personal, challenge and measurable can only improve the organization so far without more resources, people resources, an innovative change to the work environment, or the introduction of technology, as three examples. However, I would suggest that an active goal setting process will allow an organization to recognize where the tension between organizational goals and individual goals exist, the capacity where it shows up and possible opportunities to balance the goals of the individuals.

To improve the goal setting process in the future, I would suggest sharing the definition of "good" with the employee for their role and instructions to include the definition of success in each goal. When I conducted goal setting sessions myself or listen to the responses from the interviews, I get the sense that many employees do not know what "good" performance is, unless they have been in the role for a few years. I want to learn more about the impact of sharing what good, better and best performance is. Using professional sports as an example, all

players and most fans know what performance it takes to be good and how much more it takes to be the best. If we shared our player stats, it would give all our employees a sense of how they are performing compared to what is possible. There is a risk to the organization's culture and their tolerance for competitiveness, however, I would suggest that an organization can find a balance and the added information would provide clarity to more employees.

The stated goals of employees should have a more defined definition of done. As used in Agile project management methodology, the definition of done is the acceptance criteria of work. These acceptance criteria could include due date, quality standards, and quantity completed to name a few. The definition of done is specific to the goal and provides objective ways to measure success. The goal setting forms, goals could follow a formula, which includes the needed criteria. For example, using a SMART goal: I will sell an average of \$19,200 of DWP a month totaling \$230,000 this year. Specific: Sell DWP; Measurable: sell an avg \$19,200 equaling \$230,000; Attainable: this is the average for our sales agents in that region; Relevant: selling this product is the essential functions of this sales role; Time-bound: Avg \$19,200 a month equaling \$230,000 this year. Instructing participants to set more refined goals by stating the criteria for clarity and objectivity can improve the resulting goals.

5.3.7 Focus on Future

5.3.7.1 Past Goal Setting Processes (Pre-Interview Results)

In pre-interviews, only 42% (n=10) of participants talked about future advancements or promotion with their supervisors, and only 21% (n=5) received training to develop themselves. When I asked them to share a little more about how they felt about not having an opportunity to talk about development or training, one participant shared “I didn’t see a future with them. They could not train me to do more.” I asked participants if they felt like they belonged at the organization, the same 42% (n=10) answered yes, and 58% (n=14) said no, as the ones who responded the same as when asked if they talked about future advancements or promotions. Showing a relationship between belonging and seeing a future with the organization.

Of the employees who had received training in the past, 80% (n=8) reported that only online training was available to them. Among the few participants who experienced in-person training, they saw the development as unhelpful: “There was a disconnect from my day-to-day work.” “There was no follow-up to build on the skills that I learned.” When training is not explicitly relevant to daily duties, used frequently or followed up on with activities, the participants had a difficult time developing their skill set and applying what they learned at work.

5.3.7.2. Redesigned Goal Setting Process (Post-Interview Results)

The number of participants that shared how they wanted to develop professional increased from 42% (n=10) to 100% (n=24) and those who identified training opportunities went from 21% (n=5) to 83% (n=20). One participant said, “I felt supported to get more training,” while another shared, “We agreed to what training I would get this year.” However, out of the

100% (n=24) of participants that shared they wanted to develop professionally, 97% (n=22) of them had development goals defined in their conversation sheets, and 83% (n=20) of participants had agreement from their supervisor to develop, but only 25% (n=6) discussed the specific role for a potential future advancement. When asked if they felt like they belonged to the organization, 100% (n=24) said yes, which again was the same number of responses to if the participant shared how they want to develop professionally.

5.3.7.3 Relationship with Previous Research (Tie to Literature)

The design of this process was to provide an opportunity for the supervisor and the employee to intentionally discuss career advancements. The literature tells us that career advancement opportunities with a clear career progression lead to engagement (Mone & London, 2010; Seijts & Crim, 2006). Additionally, engaged employees care about the future of the organization and their future with the organization through career advancement (Seijts & Crim, 2006).

5.3.7.4 Emerging Issues

In this process, we have seen an increase in the number of participants who talk about future advancement. “We agreed to what training I would get this year” and “I felt supported to get more training” were two of the responses from the participants. This process was useful in creating a dialog about potential development opportunities and trying to schedule the next

step. A participant shared “I understood the process on how I could get development opportunities.” However, only a few conversations specifically identified promotional opportunities. Development goals were about how to do their current roles better, but not their next role or a role in another department. Even in the new process, which had a question and direction to ask about potential advancement opportunities a participant shared “We didn’t talk about promotions.” The goal setting documents have a question that asks, “What development and advancement opportunities are you interested in?” with the direction to *discuss what opportunities are possible and when they are available and discuss long-term development opportunities*, but participants confirmed that discussion did not focus on promotions. I asked the three participating supervisors why they did not talk about promotions. They responded: “I do not know what promotional opportunities are open,” “I want them to stay in their job, mine is the only job they can promote to,” and “it felt uncomfortable to talk about promotions.” The lack of conversation about promotions shows that we need to equip our supervisors to answer questions about someone’s future with the organization and the need to support the development and provided opportunities for growth.

Many of the unanswered questions were in this section where the conversation was about the employee’s performance and potential. One of the cultural tools is a 9-box grid, used to share performance and potential on a 3X3 grid. Following the performance and potential questions meant to provide feedback to the employee specifically about their promotability, there was a question for the supervisor and employee to discuss promotional opportunities. However, the interviews had a few comments like “we did not talk about promotions.” Only

25% (n=6) identified potential promotions on their conversation sheets. Of the six promotions defined, all of them were in the same office location, in the same department, and under the same supervisor. For example, a customer service representative for a product identified a promotion to a sales agent in that same product in the same office. There is a disconnect between what a supervisor believes is a promotion from what an employee may see as a promotion. An employee may see a promotion as a new role that pays more, whereas in our organization a promotion is from one level to the next, such as sales agent to branch manager. Without creating clarity about this difference, this section of the goal setting process is underutilized. There is a gap between the request to talk about performance and potential, including potential promotions, the supervisors and employees' comfort in discussing the topic. I want to ask supervisors if they are scared, to be honest with employees. Are they afraid that if they are honest that the employee, the employee will leave or have high expectations that cannot be met? Likewise, I want to know if employees are afraid to talk about potential positions because of what the supervisor may say if they are interested in a role in another department because the supervisor will then stop focusing on them. My experience and research show that managers that are worried about their jobs or performance ratings are afraid to make more than a small change (Starbuck, 1983), missing the opportunity to help their employees make a more significant contribution. The lack of support for development into new positions and opportunities for growth for a role outside of the department or location removes a valuable ingredient needed for succession planning for the organization.

We have the chance to narrow the gap for advancement/promotion opportunities with succession planning activities before the goal setting session. To name a few tools that would work in my organization: creating career path plans, defining the criteria for a promotion into each role, providing a list of open positions, clearly explaining the difference between positions and levels, and creating a succession plan so that supervisors can see which employees are prepared to enter into a new role. Each of these activities is a part of a quality succession planning initiative, but an organization must be committed to keeping these tools current and available, Auto Club updates and shares these tools inconsistently. We need to create process resolve these issues.

5.3.8 Buy-in to the Process

For the post-interviews, I interviewed 24 employees who volunteered and who completed the goal setting sessions conducted by one of three supervisors. All four supervisors completed the supervisor training in the initial goal setting rollout and the training for the redesigned goal setting process. However, one supervisor did not follow the goals setting process.

5.3.8.1 Redesigned Goal Setting Process (Post-Interview Results)

During the post-interviews, it was clear if the employee did not experience the redesigned goal setting process as intended because they shared that they completed their goal

conversations over the phone and only took a few minutes. Even though the directions stated that the meetings should occur in person and should be comprehensive and collaborative, 17% (n=4) of the participants shared that they did their goals setting process over the phone, it was brief, and they would receive their goals or roadmap by email. As I reviewed the individual results, most of the questions answered 'no' in the post-interviews came from employees of the supervisor who did not follow the process. The 17% (n=4) who told me that they completed their goal setting conversations over the phone in a matter of minutes, did not fully participate in the new goal setting process did share that they were engaged in their work. Two of those three respondents reported that they did not know the organization's goals, their goals were not challenging, or that they felt like they could impact their team's performance. When I asked why that supervisor did not follow the process, he shared, "When they are not on the floor (at their desk selling), they are not making their goals...they do not have time to talk about setting goals, they need to be hitting them." When I asked again later, as I was working on these results, why he did not follow the process he told me "I know what they need to do, I don't have time to sit down and go through a whole process to get there...They like it when I just tell them, it saves them time and gets them back to selling."

5.3.8.2 Relationship with Previous Research (Tie to Literature)

The effort from the supervisor becomes vital because employees who have a healthy relationship with their supervisors tend to set more demanding learning goals and appear to be more eager to meet them (Bezuijen et al., 2010), leveraging the engagement variable of an

employee's supervisor. To do this, I would tailor my message, frame the issue, consider emotions of both sides, find the right time, ask others for insights, consider the norms of the organization and suggest solutions to overcome hurdles (Ashford & Detert, 2015).

5.3.8.3 Emerging Issues

I was surprised that a supervisor who knew about and volunteered for the research project still did not follow the process outlined in goal setting. The supervisors did not know which employees were participating in the interviews, but all the supervisors attended two pieces of training and were aware that some employees volunteered for the research project. Therefore, I propose that two pieces of training, awareness, and organizational acceptance of a process are not enough for all supervisors to adopt a method. The CEO demonstrated organizational acceptance by doing the process with his direct reports. The results found in the conversations sheets showed that leaders mimicked their conversation session with the CEO with their employees, and those supervisors did the same with their employees. All of the leaders accepted the redesigned process except for this one supervisor.

This supervisor relied on his experience of the organization, its products, and that employee's past performance. Ironically, his mindset towards the process lends credibility to its design. Similar assumptions from the consultants lead to the need to improve the process. The issue with telling an employee what their goals should be, although they may be what they eventually commit to, is that you are asking the employee to go mentally go from where they are to where the supervisor is without going through space in between. In other words, the

process of talking about performance, providing feedback, imagining what is possible and committing to goals is also a process for the employee to make sense of their work, work environment, feedback, goals, and future. Without that conversation, the employees' journey is incomplete and potentially disengaging. Many employees need that conversation to go from what they achieved in the past to what they think they can succeed in the future. In this circumstance, I would suggest dedicating extra time to supervisors who are not bought in to explain further the evidence that was used to construct the process. Moreover, to tailor a message to those supervisors' needs sharing how the process would help them meet their own goals.

5.3.9 Participants' Feelings

5.3.9.1 Past Goal Setting Processes (Pre-Interview Results)

Another challenge is that I am uncertain if the process was effective in allowing the employee to discuss how they feel about their work and work environment. Much of the engagement literature defines engagement using emotion. When I asked for participants to share about their past goal setting experiences in the pre-interviews, they used words like "care," "engaged," "passion," "angry," "frustrated," or "felt." However, I had no bases to measure or evaluate the words or responses from participants who shared emotions.

5.3.9.2 Redesigned Goal Setting Process (Post-Interview Results)

Similar to past goal setting experiences, when I asked how the participants experienced the redesigned goal setting process, they shared words like “believe,” “feel,” “thankful,” “scared,” and “felt.” However, my research and questions did not prepare me to measure the responses or change in responses from the pre to post-interviews.

5.3.9.3 Relationship with Previous Research (Tie to Literature)

Engagement is when an employee is invested emotionally in their work (absorbed) (Christian et al., 2011; Kahn, 1990; Macey et al., 2009; Saks & Gruman, 2014) or they can express themselves in their work (Kahn, 1990; Mone et al., 2011; Saks & Gruman, 2014; Schaufeli et al., 2002). The responses from participants support the use of emotion when discussing their engagement or experience of the new goal setting process.

5.3.9.4 Emerging Issues

Although there is no agreed upon definition of engagement in the literature (Saks & Gruman, 2014), the engagement literature shows clearly links engagement to the emotions of the employee as it uses words like absorbed, emotionally invested; express themselves, personal presence, trust, and fairness. I was unable to assess the emotional investment of the employee potentially due to my lack of training in emotional assessment or the questions in the goal setting process and interviews, the latter likely being a result of the former. The issues with measuring emotion are the Intrinsic ambiguity of language and the words used to describe

emotion are hard to quantify. A qualitative measurement needs to be established to interpret language, and I would need to be trained to interpret language or to evaluate emotion.

5.3.10 Summary

During pre-interviews participants, on average, answered yes 43% (n=10.3) of time, and no 41% (n=9.8) of the time, which excludes N/A responses. The pre-interview responses are reflective of 50% (n=12) of participants answering that they are engaged in their work. The data from the surveys support the engagement literature. For the post-interview results, on average, participants answered yes 53% (n=13) more in the post-interview compared to the pre-interview, showing that including the variables of engagement from the literature in the goal setting process provided an effective way for employees to talk about their engagement. Participants who feel engaged in their work rose from 50% (n=12) to 100% (n=24). Participants told me “I can give 100% to what I am doing,” “I feel like I am engaged in my work,” and “I believe in what we are here to do.” Admittedly, participants may have been telling me what they think I wanted to hear, but they were under the impression that I was improving the goal setting process questions. They were not aware that I was using engagement theory to improve the process nor that I was listening for the impact of engagement literature. At the completion of the redesigned goal setting session, I reviewed the results found in the goal setting forms. I saw a significant change in the quality of answers on the conversations sheets as described above. Table 10 is a summary of themes and emerging ideas from the analysis.

Table 10 Summary of Themes From Analysis	
Themes from Participants	Emerging Ideas
Level of Engagement with the Organization's Work	The goal setting conversation is a time for the supervisor and employee to discuss if this is the right organization for the employee to be engaged.
Level of Engagement with the Individual's Work	<p>The goal setting conversation is a time the employee to make more choices in how they work towards their goals.</p> <p>The goal setting process is a process where the organization can cascade goals from the organization to the employee without harming engagement.</p>
Synergy Between Employee and Organization	<p>The goal setting conversation is a time when the employee to share what the "right work environment" means to them.</p> <p>The organization also has the opportunity to learn how to prioritize the needs of the organization compared to the employees.</p> <p>The goal setting conversation can be used to learn how to build trust between the supervisor and the employee, what it means for the supervisor to act in the employee's best interest, and how to create a feeling of fairness.</p>
Performance Feedback	<p>Dates to meet again to review goals should be included in the goal setting process.</p> <p>Organizations need another method to provide real-time feedback that integrates the goal setting process.</p> <p>Real-time performance feedback needs to tie to the employee's goals.</p>
Goal Setting Process	New leaders should be able to continue goal setting activities and provide feedback on goals without slowing down performance.

Goals and Attainability	Increasing organizational goals year over year should be done in consideration of the employees and capacity issues need to be reconciled before expecting the employee to set higher goals.
Focus on Future	<p>Development goals should be included in the goal setting process with promotional opportunities in mind.</p> <p>Supervisors should be made aware of current job openings to prepare for promotional conversations.</p> <p>Potential promotions or reasons why an employee is not ready to be promoted should be included in the goal setting conversation.</p>
Buy-in to the Process	Extra time should be dedicated to explain the process further and gaining buy-in from supervisors who are not bought into the process.
Participants' Feelings	Developing a way to learn more about how an employee feels about their work, work environment, and the process could provide valuable insight into how to leverage this process as well as others.
Reducing Complexity in the Process	The goal setting process should only consist of requirements that provide value and not be overly burdensome to complete.

Instead of revising and resting all themes listed above, some of which can be improved with actions stated in Table 10, I focused on improving the themes that I expect would have the most significant impact on improving the goal setting process for our organization. In the next section, I considered revise and reset actions for creating a real-time feedback process, how to focus on the future using development goals, how to create buy-in for the process from all supervisors, how to learn more about how participants feel about their work, and how to reduce complexity in the goal setting process.

5.4 AR Cycle 2: Revise and Reset

5.4.1 Feedback Process

Based on the problems and challenges from Table 10, I recommend the following changes to the process. First, increasing the frequency of the goal setting conversations would create more opportunities for ongoing feedback between the supervisor and the employee. A goal setting process, even done quarterly, is not enough for providing ongoing feedback to the employee (Bakker & Bal, 2010). From the literature review, feedback should support individual performance as well as group performance (Matsui, Kakuyama, & Onglatco, 1987), it should be honest (Catteeuw et al., 2007) it should be offered in real-time (Bakker & Bal, 2010), and should be ongoing (Mone & London, 2010). A goal setting process that connects to a real-time feedback strategy could impact engagement as well as performance. In a real-time feedback model, as described by Bakker & Bal (2010), feedback is offered weekly and can influence that week's work goals, performance, and engagement through providing opportunities to meet frequently, offer specific insights to the individual employee, and focus on the employee's specific strengths and weaknesses. Useful tools for this process include a routine schedule, feedback conversation script, and practice.

Our organization has a real-time feedback process, but there is a limited connection to the goals setting process. The real-time feedback process focuses on sales activities such as daily callbacks, preparing quotes, and scheduling or conducting follow-up meetings, including goal

setting, script practicing, and coaching. However, these activities are not explicitly stated as goals during the annual goal setting process on the employees' roadmaps. Using the employee's roadmap goals to populate their digital scorecard, which is useful for real-time feedback, could create a connection by using the employee's annual goals in the digital scorecard. The supervisor then can reference the scorecard when giving feedback and offer specific insights. For example, a supervisor might say, "Remember when we talked about your goals, you told me that you would like to respond to questions within 24 hours. In reviewing your response time over the last two weeks, I see that..." The digital scorecard makes real-time feedback possible by keeping the employee's goals in front of them daily, and the supervisor referencing what the employee set as goals supports the employee using ongoing feedback.

Ongoing, real-time, feedback can also be used to help the employee to adapt their goals to the changing work environment. For example, a supervisor might say, "since you have started using a softphone, you have been making many more calls and have actually already hit the goal you established for this quarter. Do you want to increase your sales goals so that they continue to challenge you and so that you can lead the group in sales, as you wanted?" This example shows how the feedback can support the employee to use a new tool to reach more of their goals.

5.4.2 Focus on the Future - Development Goals

Though the revised goal setting process increased the quality and content of the goal setting conversations between the supervisor and employee about professional development, an important next step would be to focus more on how to expand the development conversation beyond the employee's current position. Many of the development goals that were set were for the employee's current job. The process should also help the employee set development goals needed to promote to a new position. Planning activities before the goal setting session to create career path plans, criteria for a person to be promoted into each role, a list of open positions, and a succession plan could be used to enhance this portion of the conversation. The employee would be given specific learning goals to improve performance (Seijts & Crim, 2006) which would increase the likelihood that he could see a path forward within the organization, therefore increasing his sense of belonging (Mone & London, 2010).

These planning activities, among others, could provide the supervisor with the information needed to have a detailed conversation about promotional opportunities. From an organizational perspective, making succession planning and talent development a priority would allow leaders to enhance hiring and training processes, which would have multiple benefits, including supporting the employee in their development desires, learning who would like to be promoted and finding a potential employee to be promoted into their open roles.

5.4.3 Buy-in to the Process

The primary revision that I would suggest for the process is to invest time into gaining buy-in from all participants. Specifically, I would recommend dedicating extra time to ensuring that supervisors understand the process, both in terms of hearing concerns, it's grounding in the research, as well as details for effective implementation.

The impact that a supervisor has on employees' engagement is substantial. In the literature review, I did not focus and therefore did not evaluate the impact the supervisor has on employee engagement. Returning to the literature during the analysis, I found that Beck and Harter (2015) argue that supervisors account for 70% of the variance in engagement. Additionally, they claim that supervisors can create the right work environment, but only 18% of supervisors have a high level of talent to manage others, and many organizations promote employees to managers based on their performance, rather than their talent to manage others (Beck & Harter, 2015). With these thoughts in mind, buy-in from the supervisors is a vital part of this goals setting process being successful. The organization has started training supervisor on the goal setting process, and additional skills to enhance their leadership skills in a new leadership development department that focuses on teaching management skills, leadership principles, and executive development. The goal of this department is to develop leadership talent.

5.4.4 Participants' Feelings

To further revise the process a focus on developing a deeper understanding of how participants feel about their work and work environment. Kahn (1990) argues that engagement deals with an employee's willingness to engage in his work without sacrificing his own self-expression: what they think or feel and their connection to others. By adjusting the research questions to elicit more information about a participant's emotions, a deeper understanding of his level of engagement would be attained, which would have many benefits, not least of which would be an increased ability to predict performance. To ensure that these revised questions are well-developed, I would recommend the participation of a researcher trained in psychology.

5.4.5 Reducing Complexity in the Process

The results of the redesigned goal setting process suggest that the questions are precise and solicit the appropriate response, but the process is somewhat cumbersome, having many questions, tools, and context-dependent components. An example of a context-dependent component would be an employee's contribution to the team or department/location goals, which are both found in the engagement variables, but also add complexity. Saks & Gruman (2001) share that performance management processes have become overly complicated with a multitude of tools, paperwork, and steps, which become excessively burdensome and therefore ineffective. The redesigned goal setting process takes time and requires the supervisor to

understand many details that are not explicitly named in the documents or training but are useful because of our culture. For example, understanding the term contribution rather than using performance, results or success. I recommend simplifying the goal setting process by removing any questions, step, or expectation that does not add significant value to the process. Using the 80/20 rule, the Pareto principle, as an example, investing the time to identify the roughly 20% of the goal setting process that provides roughly 80% of the value, steps could be removed to make the process less burdensome. Doing this would require more testing to measure the value of each component and the impact of removing it from the process, which may not be consistent from one organization to the other.

Another way to remove steps leading up to the process is to enhance the goal setting forms by using a Human Resources Information System to digitally create the conversations sheets and roadmaps, embedding the supervisor session's outcomes, and integrating the real-time scorecard available to the employees and supervisors. A digital roadmap could also be input automatically, which would save time and potential errors in presenting the goals. These enhancements would focus on saving time, reducing redundant work, and minimizing mistakes while transferring data.

After the literature review, I chose variables of engagement to embed into the goal setting process, but I did not prioritize the variables for the organization or the participants. A more in-depth literature review could be done to evaluate how to measure each variable, then prioritized the variables based on the value to the organization or participants. With this in mind, the organization's process could focus on the top five or ten variables rather than the 32

I have identified. The purpose of this effort would be to provide increased rigor to the process of selecting the variables that deliver the most value, ultimately allowing a researcher to determine which variables to remove from the process.

6. Discussion

Reflecting on the original problem: "Employees are setting vague and incomplete goals that were not measurable and lacked expected outcomes or deadline," I can see how developing a process to create a better way for our organization to set goals was successful. I improved the goal setting conversations within the process and participants' experience. By shifting the focus from the goals setting process, done in the pre-thesis work, to how employees experience the process, we sought to change the overall meaning of the process. The focus is less about assigning goals to an employee and more about understanding what goals the employee wants to achieve, how they will be achieved, and what professional development is needed to make an employee's success more likely, all with an eye on opportunities for advancement within the organization. The research project provided further information on which to base a performance and goal setting process and what actions are needed to support employees through and after the process. This research project aimed to improve my organization's goal setting process using the engagement literature. The purpose of this research was to explore whether incorporating variables of engagement within goal setting conversations could create a better experience for the employee.

6.1 Conclusions

In completing this research project, I have found that:

1. The engagement literature can be integrated into the goal setting process, and we can involve the employee more in the goal setting conversation, by asking for their

thoughts and believes of their emotional investment, work environment and their ability to make a difference as they set goals.

2. Using the variables of engagement in the goal setting process can positively impact employee's goals by making the goals meaningful to the employee and connecting their goals to the goals of the organization.
3. When variables of engagement are discussed in a goal setting process, participants have a positive experience during the process.
4. Providing the predetermined, position relevant goals does not reduce overall employee engagement with those goals.

6.2 Relationship with Previous Research

These findings align with those found in the literature that show goal setting is a process that can be used to impact the employee motivation (Dweck et al., 1993; Knight et al., 2001; Latham & Yukl, 1975; Locke, 1968; Matsui et al., 1987; Sujan et al., 1994; Tubbs, 1986, 1993).

All 24 participants shared that they felt engaged in their work after completing the redesigned goal setting process. This process built on Gruman & Saks' (2011) recommendation to raise performance levels by focusing on developing engagement rather than using performance management processes, embedding engagement variables into the performance management process positively correlated to improved performance. Among other factors, this was likely an effect of creating a more obvious alignment between the organization and the employee. This process also supports Pulakos' (2004) approach to performance management in that it can clarify job expectations, enhance productivity, develop capabilities, align desired

behaviors with the goals of the organization, provide insights into decisions about employees, and improve communication between the supervisor and the employee. There is evidence that an engagement theory approach to the goal setting process can be used as a way for supervisors to collaborate with the employee about the team, division, and organizational goals, which will foster that employee's engagement (Seijts & Crim, 2006).

6.3 Limitations

Although I see this research project as an overall success, it is not without its limitations. I should stress that the objective of this research project was to change how our organization's employees set goals by leveraging engagement variables. My long-term interest is to explore other methods to increase employee engagement and performance outside of the goal setting process and determine to what degree those increases positively impact performance and well-being. However, the desire to explore how to increase engagement and performance is out of the scope and timeframe of this project.

6.3.1 Questions Left Unanswered

Although my findings are generally compatible with engagement and goal setting research, there are several areas I was not able to access during this research project. For example, I was not able to gain an in-depth understanding of how the participants feel about

their work or if they could express themselves in their work as described by Kahn (1990). Participants' responses also did not provide profound insights into their emotional investment in their work or if they were absorbed while working (Christian et al., 2011; Kahn, 1990; Macey et al., 2009; Saks & Gruman, 2014). Similarly, I did not gain sufficient insights to measure if a feeling of fairness (Macey et al., 2009; Maslach & Leiter, 1997) or a high level of trust exists within the organization (Macey et al., 2009). Lastly, I did not hear participants share if their supervisor acts in their best interest (Macey et al., 2009; Mone & London, 2010) or if they trust their supervisor (Macey et al., 2009). When I considered how to capture feelings during the interviews, I thought that the interview recordings would provide a way to interpret emotions. I believed that I would be able to group similar emotional terms into groups to share the key findings. I considered using an emotional intelligence rubric to make sense of the responses. However, I realized that those parameters/criteria were beyond the scope of this thesis and would take more time than this project allowed because of the rigor required for such an effort. As an example, I could have organized the interview responses into self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management. This example would have required a significant amount of additional literature to pair with goal setting and engagement theory. Additionally, I acknowledge that I could have designed better questions to measure emotions, but I did not have that awareness while designing the interview questions. At that point to go back after analyzing the interview results would have risked the timeline of this thesis.

6.3.2 Research Project Constraints

I have had little exposure to methods in creating research-oriented questions. Therefore, the questions had flaws and created some inconsistencies in the results. Some of the constraints include: I assumed the participants were consistent in their understanding of terms such as goals setting, engagement or feedback, and answered accordingly. I lacked the insights, at the time I created the questions, to know if I constructed the questions or sequence of questions in a way that they would add value or if they were unnecessary and would not warrant analyzation. I did not know if participants would withhold valuable data because of how I worded the questions.

As I was analyzing the results of the interviews, it occurred to me that it would have been beneficial to use the same questions for the pre and post interviews. Although there was a symmetry to the questions in that I used similar questions in the pre-interview as in the post-interview, using the same questions would have produced more reliable results. For example, in the pre-interview I asked, *Could you impact how your team performed towards those goals?* Whereas in the post-interviews I asked, *Do you feel like you could impact your team's performance?* In this example, I used the word goals in the post-interview but not in the pre-interviews, and one question is asking if the participant can influence performance toward goals, and the other is if they could influence performance. Strictly speaking, those are different questions with different criteria. If the questions were the same, in the context of the past or present, the decision criteria would have been the same, making the answers more reliable.

6.3.3 Bias

I am aware of my position of the organization and my reflection of my view of the process compared to how the participants experienced it. My thoughts and values inevitably influence my interpretations without objective distance. Some of those assumptions were:

- I believed in the goals of the organization and was a member of the team who set them.
- I thought that the performance of the organization in the years leading up to this project was low and we needed to achieve higher goals with fewer resources.
- I wanted to outperform other peer organizations.
- I also thought it was necessary to change our organization to grow.

These are only examples of my bias, but they reveal my values in change, growth and a drive to perform. Therefore, my analysis leans to those ends.

Although I attempted to prevent my role in the organization and its authority to influence the results, my role may have caused people to skew their answers more positively as a means to please me or not be seen in a negative light. Furthermore, each participant accepted a degree of vulnerability to participate and share negative responses to questions. However, when I asked follow-up questions, each participant share more detail in their answers, leading me to believe they were honest. To mitigate, I implanted the tactics outlined in my ethics proposal and the following techniques.

To reduce the bias where a participant sees me as an expert and agrees with or tries to respond to my questions positively, I used questions that did not have a right or wrong answer and focus on the participant's point of view. To reduce social desirability bias (Dodou & Winter, 2014), I tried creating an open environment to support a free dialogue between the interviewee

and me by having a friendly tone, using positive regard, accepting answers as if they were true to that participant and following up to answer that were negative with an interested inquiry. Such as “tell me how that can be improved” or “what change you would like to see” type questions to help participants to project their own ideas and feelings and still be honest. All participants were aware that the research question focused on a process created by me for the organization, as such, I needed to consider the participant’s bias toward myself or the organization. To migrate this bias, I focused on maintaining a neutral stance and was mindful not to reinforce positive responses of the process.

During the *reflecting* stage of the AR Cycle, I was able to return to the original recordings and documents, but my analysis still contained my own biases. I filtered the data through my own personal preferences and experiences, leaving open the possibility that my interpretation may be limited or skewed (Rigg & Trehan, 2004). My account was from the perspective of a senior leader in the organization, a supervisor of 12 managers, a leader with performance goals, a researcher with project requirements and student with education goals, to name only a few. Every decision I made for this project was based out of my assumptions and, although not knowingly, not all my assumptions are still useful. If I am honest with myself, I want my work to be successful, so my interpretation may have confirmation bias. However, I was able to diminish the tendency to remember points that supported my beliefs by listening to the recordings four times as described in chapter three. The recordings allowed me to listen to the actual responses from the volunteers rather than relying on my memory or notes during the analysis. The

recordings allowed me to listen to the responses several times to reevaluate my interpretation and impression of the responses, as discussed in Chapter 3.

As said in the constraints, question-order bias may have influenced participants' responses. When I designed my questions, I was mindful to ask more general questions before asking questions that were more specific to my research focus, such as *are you engaged in your work*. Moreover, when I asked a participant to elaborate on his/her answers, I used phrases like, “tell me more” rather than, “how much do you trust your supervisor?” I also used participants' words in quotes to ask for clarity, rather than to summarize their responses in my own words.

6.4 Implications of Findings

This project supports the argument for using performance management processes to focus on the multiple benefits of developing employee engagement, rather than just one potential outcome of this increased level of connectedness: higher performance (Gruman & Saks, 2011). On the face of it, this would suggest that integrating engagement theory into a performance management process may be an important factor in improving the overall experience of the employee. If further research confirms the tentative conclusions of this project, then there would be a case for using the goals of the employees as a predictor of performance and engagement. Since the research strongly supports performance being boosted by engagement, it is reasonable to look deeper into what goals increase engagement and if those goals can predict higher levels of performance. At Auto Club, we have seen a significant

improvement in the alignment of goals of the employee with the organization and increased performance for our employees and the overall organization, supporting the work of Medlin & Green (2009) as well as Latham & Yukl (1975); Matsui et al. (1987), Tubb, (1986), Knight et al., (2001), Dweck et al. (1993), and Sujan et al. (1994). Although there are many changes that contribute to the increase in performance, the goal setting process discussed in this thesis remains the primary method to set goals and conduct performance evaluations for Auto Club.

The redesigned goals setting process created a better experience for the employees. The intention of the process is to embrace the emotional investment from an employee in their work, but I wanted the employee to also have good expertise during the goal setting conversations. A couple of responses from participants were, “that was better than I expected” “the conversation was great,” “that went well,” and “wow, that was not what I expected.” Using Pulakos’ (2004) approach to performance management, we clarified job expectations, enhanced productivity conversations, agreed how to develop employee capabilities, aligned desired behaviors with the goals of the organization, provided insights into decisions about employees, and improved communication between the supervisor and the employee. In this approach, we asked employees not only to participate in setting their goals but also asked them to put themselves into their goals. Although the conversations have been anecdotal, at Auto Club, I have heard employee share that they are looking forward to receiving feedback in their next [goal setting] conversation, and they enjoy talking about how they can develop their skills to do more.

6.5 Future Research

Possible areas for further research include how to measure and prioritize the variables of engagement; how to create the right work environment to maximize engagement; and how to integrate the variables of engagement into the process to set the organization's overall goals, feedback processes, and leadership principles.

From my literature review, I had no bases to treat one variable of engagement as more important than another. In more recent research, Beck & Harter (2015) say that managers account for 70% of the variance in engagement, leading me to expect that we should better understand how engagement variables impact each other. Moreover, how can we use the variables to create the right work environment?

Another critical area for further exploration is the connection between the work environment and engagement. Specifically, seeking to understand how best to create an organizational culture or work environment that maximizes employees' engagement could be a valuable next step. Deviating from an externally created employee engagement survey, which implies that the higher the score on that survey the more employees are engaged, I want to know how to measure variables in a way to get the most engagement that is valuable to that organization's specific work environment. In other words, if a company such as Gallup creates an engagement survey, they provide questions that focus on measuring the variables that their work has seen the highest level of engagement on average across their surveyed companies. Then using linear regression, they calculate an engagement score. The issues are that the survey

questions are generic and may not be relevant to that organization's vision. The results may say that your employees will be more engaged if you focus on “these variables” however for the organization to move in the direction of the CEO’s vision, “those variables” would be more beneficial. For example, engagement survey results may say that employees will be more engaged if you pay them more, but as a non-profit in the human services’ field, if the organization pays its employees more, it could negatively impact the sustainability of the organization. Still further as their employees earn more, it may create a greater social, economic disconnect between the people the organization is serving. In this example, focusing on the mission of the organization to engage employees may be better for the organization long-term rather than increasing compensation, which would only impact engagement in the short term. Further research could focus on using variables of engagement to create a complex adaptive system for the organization's work environment and move away from a system that is designed to improve a year over year score on a survey that was created by a firm that does not know the specific work environment.

I recommend future research to understand better how to integrate the variables of engagement into more organizational processes. For example, engagement theory may improve processes such as overall organizational goal setting, providing ongoing feedback; and training leadership principles. Adding more detail to training for the organization’s leadership principles, an organization could connect its leadership principles to building trust between the supervisor and the employee by using literature to define several methods. In this example, the organization is using the engagement variable trust in a supervisor to improve their leadership

across the organization. Like the results of this research project, research on how these processes can use the variables of engagement to improve how the employee experience them could improve their results.

6.6 Reflections

During this research process, I was curious about how the engagement literature could impact the goal setting process. With the help of senior leaders and my new role as Vice President of Leadership Development and People Services, I am using these results to inform the goal setting process and evaluation for an organization of now over 4,200 employees and changing a process that has failed the larger organization for over 10 years.

When we started to change our goal setting process with the consultants, we focused too much on how to make goal setting a process and not enough on how our employees experienced setting goals. I realized that by changing the process, we were changing the meaning of it. The redesigned process has employee goals as an outcome, but it includes a dialog on what the employee wants to accomplish, how they can be successful and how they can grow professionally. Now the process provides professional development, resources, and work environment to create a culture where our employees and leaders can talk about how they want to invest themselves in their work; we can approach our employee as human beings and create a work environment where each employee can contribute their very best work. To use a phrase

coined by the Stanford School, we are using a human-centric approach to set goals and inviting our employees to be engaged.

6.6.1 Reflections of the Research Process

When I started to consider my thesis topic during my DBA journey, I worked for a non-profit organization that had expenses 18% higher than their revenue, and they relied on charitable donors to give the additionally needed revenue. In that setting, I thought that manager training focused on operational discipline and a stronger performance management process for employees would help the organization get to a more sustainable financial position. Before starting my thesis, I moved to a new organization in a similar situation. Although their financials were not as dire, and they had already begun to focus on operational improvements, I still expected that a stronger performance management process would improve their organizational performance, thus their financial situation. This research project was the change I implemented. In the project, I assessed the problem, reviewed the literature, put in a change, asked how participants experienced the change, and that changed what I thought. A new performance management process as needed, but the difference had to be so much more than a means. A process that creates goals that would make the organization successful needed to be a conversation that invited the employees of the organization to be engaged in their work, the organization must invest in the employee's development and together needed to create the right

working environment. In this section, I will share how I have changed during the research process and how what I am learning is evolving.

As I started my literature review, I was utterly overwhelmed by the amount of literature relating to engagement, performance management, and goal setting. By using a research funnel approach, I was able to examine a large body of knowledge and focus in on the research relating to my project. Once I started to see the same authors and articles referenced continually, I began to see the boundaries of the literature. Search tools, article formats, and authors make key ideas easy to identify' however, organizing ideas from the research into theme was complicated and messy because the ideas often overlapped, were specific to their situation or did not make sense for my environment. I had to decide how a key idea fit into the themes of my literature review, which I refined as I had to make my choices. As my research project went on, I used a table of post-it notes on my wall to organize the key ideas and thought of how rewarding it was to see what I was learning was arranged in a way that I could use it to make decisions. I worked to reflect on a wide range of ideas and to integrate my analysis of the literature into the findings to justify my actions and interpretations. This literature review process changed how I was able to think systematically using a significant amount of information to plan action, while previously, I relied on available information and my experience to make decisions. I am humbled by the fantastic amount of information available to leaders in the body of knowledge, yet previously I relied on the data from within my organization, my past experiences, and the counsel of my peers. Now I understand how to leverage the body of knowledge to look beyond my experiences.

By far the hardest section of the research process for me was grappling with the research methodology. I thought I could approach this thesis as I have so many other work projects, which was to make time, set milestones, identify deliverables and plan action for it to be successful. However, I found that I was overconfident and wasted weeks writing without providing clarity to my research or progress in my project, as my prior experience did not require a sound approach to research. Even after my DBA modules, I had a limited understanding of how the many approaches to methodologies fit or did not meet my research goals. After feedback from my supervisor, I invested time exploring research methodology and considered different action research modalities. Once I had the opportunity to read more about the Action Research Cycle, I was able to make sense of how to move my project from literature review to reflection in actionable steps.

The AR cycle challenged me to develop my ideas by systematically and intentionally providing an opportunity for me to consider what evidence leads me to make decisions and what results led me to my conclusions. I found myself asking, “how do I know that” “have I explained this yet” or “is that really what happened?” Many times, I had to rewrite sections that move forward based on assumptions rather than because of evidence or were confusing because I jumped from one idea to the next without explaining the connection between the two. The development of my arguments did not fit a logical flow, and I reverted to declarations rather than presenting a case. I changed my writing by articulating evidence from the literature and used signposting to state my theme and actions. Using feedback from my supervisor, I continued to

develop my research skills, project delivery and thoughtful and reflective approach to the research.

Another aspect that challenged me was how to make sense of the data. When I started this project, I read the literature, synthesized the key ideas and planned action. As I wrote, I would present an idea, summarize the facts and move on. I did not consistently support my ideas, present data or tie the idea to the purpose of my thesis. I struggled to write in a way that reflected on the full richness and depth of my project. I had some concepts and some data, and I was trying to make sense of both. Then, after feedback and examining research methods, I started to use abductive reasoning to examine the contrast between the literature and the participants' responses. I worked between the two to make sense of what was happening. I considered how I was looking at the data, how that changed the goals setting process and how that impacted how I approached research. I returned to my thoughts that were superficial and uninspiring to develop my argument using the literature and participants responses, then I constructed a coherent set of actions and identified next steps.

I realize that, although Action Research methodology was rooted in empirical research, I based my research on social science and subject to how the people around me made sense of their world. I used the literature to establish what knowledge is and what we know about engagement and goal setting. I was able to make a connection from my discussion to the overall action research process. Then, accepting my role to make the goal setting process better, I developed the skill to explore the literature to understand what goal setting means to the organization and how to make the process more meaningful for those who are involved. I

recognize that the goal setting process will never be perfect. We act, we think we know what is going to happen, but there are always consequences. There is still more to know, and people express action differently, which leads to reflection. The journey continues as we question what we have learned about goals setting, how did we learn it, and how people are experiencing the process differently, which can continually improve the process.

Stepping back after working on this project for three years, I am pleased to share the impact that this project has had on my organization. Auto Club, using this goal setting process, has seen unprecedented change. As one organization of 55 other automobile clubs, was ranked 48, and before it merged with a more prominent automobile club was ranked 1, in sales and growth. Now as a part of a larger organization, we are the fastest growing automobile club in North America in terms of top line and bottom line revenue. Although I would attribute the changes to many variables, this was the only process we used to set goals, align resources, and develop our employees.

6.6.2 Reflections of My Practitioner Journey

During my modules, I was introduced to the idea of a scholar-practitioner, who linked theory to practice to create actionable knowledge (Tenkasi & Hay, 2004). The role of a scholar-practitioner is to respond to a problem using the body of knowledge, reflections and recorded outcomes (Tenkasi & Hay, 2004). Throughout this research project, I used the Action Research Cycle to develop awareness, understanding, and skills to create appropriate actions, evaluate results and suggest future actions described by Coghlan (2011). In all of this, the most powerful skill that I developed was reflection. I leveraged my reflections of the literature to define

valuable of engagement and to redesigned out organization's goal setting process. I also used the reflections of the participants of the redesigned process to collect feedback to suggest improvements of the process. I was surprised to learn that, in the past, I reacted to situations or problems, and moved on. I did not invest the time to reflect on the implementations of the actions, and if knowledge was created, it was sporadic and lacked rigor. There was a moment when I was preparing to defend this thesis, I realized I supported my thoughts with literature, evidence/data and reflection as a method to share my ideas, and my answer was incomplete without all three. Moreover, I found that reflections recorded in my journal were underdeveloped. It was not until I prepared to share them to answer anticipated questions that I supported them with literature and evidence. During my preparation, it was when I wrote my reflections to be presented that I wrestled with how I knew an idea was real, how that idea fit into the bigger picture, and how it impacted my project. This process led me to question my past leadership and how I decided on actions. This process of completing a DBA, has provided me with a powerful tool of reflection that I can employ in future projects and in my day-to-day participation at work. It has been a powerful learning experience with a potential long-term impact. Therefore, this process led me to question how I know that I know and how I will use that knowledge to lead.

6.6.3 Implications for My Leadership

Before pursuing a DBA, I assumed that leaders made decisions using mainstream bestselling non-fiction and 'real world' business experience. In both, the decision maker is limited by their understanding and experience (Hill & Rapp, 2014). This research project has provided me with insights to examine my knowledge and professional values for potential changes to how I lead in an organization. Reflecting on the beginning of my DBA journey, with the help of the literature, learning sets, the doctoral tutors, my thesis supervisor, action research and critical reflection, I have changed almost everything in how I learn as a scholar and lead as a practitioner. I learned how to question what I know about my environment, my work, the way I do things and most importantly, how I interpret the world and act in response.

Before I entered the DBA programme, my leadership approach was loyal to the organization, and I found success in achieving my goals quickly, and I did not question them. I did what I was told, and I was rewarded with new opportunities. It was when, among other motivational factors, the CEO asked me to create a performance management system under the direction that did not align with what I had read about employee engagement that I decided to enter a research-based doctoral programme. During the modules, I learned to look deeper into problems and present potential angles they had not yet considered (Landry, 1995). I found that one of my strengths was to ask questions that others did not ask and to inquire into why we were

deciding on a specific action. For example, I challenged our CEO on why we would hold our employees accountable for their individual goals yet give them all the same compensation increase regardless of their success in achieving their goals. I thought that the decision to reward employees independently of their goals would do more harm than good. Previously, I would have acted on the direction of my CEO without question. However, during my DBA modules, I used a literature review in a module to research the relationship between compensation and goal accountability and provided a more in-depth perspective on the possible consequence of the CEO's suggestion. We can improve how we make decisions by using action research (Greenwood & Levin, 2007).

As I continued to learn how to use the body of knowledge to research ideas, I became aware that it was my responsibility to be familiar with how knowledge creation happens and how the research process can inform how we make decisions. I found that we needed to accept responsibility to create information that recognizes that we are vulnerable to heavy distortion from our assumptions and biases, and research process can be used to critically reflect about the problem (Starkey & Tempest, 2008). Therefore, we have the responsibility to enhance our knowledge creation process to provide accurate and usable information rather than decision making relying on a summary of the memories and experiences of their leaders (Grant, 2005). I learned that I too had to develop the discipline to inquiring about more information rather than to advocate for what I believe to be the best solution (Raelin, 2003).

Conducting this research project has been a rewarding and challenging learning and professional experience. I have had the opportunity to explore how the knowledge I have gained

through the action research cycle helps makes sense of the world around me, but also reveals tensions and is messy. For example, what we know does not fit neatly into boxes with bows on them, and that can be frustrating, but looking at the contrast between the research and the data and working between the two to make sense of what is happening can be rewarding. I have learned that what is known is rarely outside of the context and when I move it; I change the meaning of it. My reflections connect to my role in the organization, and how they see reality; I cannot separate myself from that context. However, what we know is changing, we must reconcile what we know and how we know it, then come to a census through negotiation so we can come to a shared understanding. The actions we take are an expression of what we learned and how we reflect, which is ongoing and has consequences.

6.6.4 Moving Forward

What am learning and how I am using that knowledge is evolving? In the time I have been in the DBA programme I switched industries once, changed organizations twice, worked in five business disciplines, and promoted four times. In all these opportunities, I have been able to apply what I have learned and continue to learn more. In my new role as a Vice President of Learning and Development, I have been invited to create a leadership development program based on what I have learned about engagement during my research project. I also have repeatedly been asked to research a way to improve a process, such as interviewing, candidate selection and operational planning. In all of these, I have incorporated research methods, the

literature, and critical reflection. My own experiences no longer limit me. I am comfortable using the literature, and I am learning how to apply it to more situations.

Our organization is evolving. We have relied on a business model for over one hundred years, and with the emergence of disruptive technologies, we need to recreate what we will be for the next one hundred years. The intention of the leadership program I am leading is to transform our organization for the next century. I am responsible for the recruitment, training, coaching and mentoring of new leaders who have the potential to be an executive with the drive to lead change and are willing to transform the organization. I am using what I have learned as a scholar-practitioner to develop the leadership of this team, such as, triple loop learning, critical thinking, critical reflection inquiry, the problematizing process, and action learning, all with the support of an organizational-based learning set. I am grateful that I can share what I have learned, used the skills I have developed and invited others to evolve with me.

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Appendix 1: Rich Picture

Withdrawn for publication

Appendix 2: Pre-Interview Yes, No Questions Results

If a participant answered “no” to the questions, I would skip the follow-up questions. However, when a participant then answered “yes” to a contradictory follow-up question, I returned to the initial question for clarity and requested that they tell me more about their answer before returning to the follow-up question. Doing this was reasonably accepted by participants except for one question. In a follow-up to *Did you know your goals?*, participants were asked: *Were you successful in meeting your goals in the past?*

Appendix Table 1 Pre- Interview Questions (<i>yes-no questions only</i>)			
<i>Pre-interview Question</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>N/A</i>
1. Have you had professional goal setting sessions with your supervisor in the past?	46%	54%	0%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did you have a voice in your past goal setting sessions? 	42%	4%	54%
2. Did that organization share its goals with you?	8%	92%	0%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did you understand your role in those goals? (or role in the organization's purpose) 	8%	92%	0%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could you influence how work was done in the past? 	75%	17%	0%
3. Did you know your goals?	75%	25%	0%

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How were your goals set? (Your decision [Yes] Assigned by a supervisor [No]) 	21%	54%	17%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were your goals challenging? 	50%	25%	17%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did you have the needed resources in the past to meet your goals? 	33%	67%	0%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were you successful in meeting your goals in the past? (even if you did not define your goals) 	100%	0%	0%
4. Have done a performance review in the past?	33%	67%	0%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did you have a voice [in your performance review]? 	29%	71%	0%
3. Did you receive ongoing feedback about your performance in the past?	50%	50%	0%
4. Tell me about your relationship with your supervisor in the past (Positive [Yes] negative [No] not sure/indifferent [N/A])?	38%	46%	17%
5. Did you have team goals in the past?	54%	46%	0%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could you impact how your team performed towards those goals? 	50%	4%	46%
6. Have you had an opportunity to share where you wanted to develop yourself professionally in the past?	42%	58%	0%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did you get training for those opportunities? [how you wanted to develop yourself] 	21%	21%	58%
7. Did you understand the organization's mission and/or vision of the past?	33%	67%	0%

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did you believe in it [the mission or vision of that organization]? ([No] if they did not know it) 	46%	54%	0%
8. Did you feel like you belonged to that organization?	42%	58%	0%
9. Where you engaged in your goals?	50%	50%	0%

Post-Interview Yes-No Questions Results

Appendix Table 2 Post- Interview Questions <i>(yes-no questions only)</i>			
<i>Post Interview Question</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>N/A</i>
1. Did the organization share its goals with you?	92%	8%	0%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you understand your role in achieving those goals? 	92%	0%	8%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can you influence how the organization does work? 	96%	0%	4%
2. Do you understand your goals?	96%	4%	0%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How were your goals set? (Your decision [Yes] Assigned by a supervisor [No]) 	92%	8%	0%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did you have a voice during your conversation? 	100%	0%	0%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are your goals challenging? 	88%	8%	4%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you have the resources needed to meet your goals? 	92%	4%	4%

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you know how your supervisor will provide feedback to you about your goals? 	100%	0%	0%
3. Describe your relationship with your supervisor (Positive [Yes] negative [No]not sure/indifferent [N/A])?	75%	21%	4%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has this process changed your relationship with your supervisor? 	33%	67%	0%
4. Do you feel like you could impact your team's performance?	92%	8%	0%
5. Did you have an opportunity to share how you wanted to develop professionally?	100%	0%	0%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did you schedule/agree on the training/support to prepare for your next professional opportunity? 	83%	17%	0%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did you discuss future advancements (promotions)? 	25%	75%	0%
6. Has this process changed your perception of your work environment?	71%	29%	0%
7. Do you understand the organization's mission?	100%	0%	0%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you believe in the mission of the organization? 	100%	0%	0%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can you recite the mission? (only the Prepare and Protect phrase) 	100%	0%	0%
8. Are you engaged in your work for the organization?	100%	0%	0%
9. Do you feel engaged in your goals?	100%	0%	0%

Appendix Table 3 shows one question if the question was the same in both the pre and post interview and shows two questions if the questions were different. The first question in the cell is from the pre-interview with the post-interview question below.

Appendix Table 3 Interview Theme (<i>yes-no questions only</i>)			
<i>Interview Theme</i>	<i>Past</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Change</i>
1. Did the organization share its goals with you?	8%	92%	+86%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did you understand your role in achieving those goals? 	8%	92%	+86%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can you influence how work was done in the past? Can you influence how the organization does work? 	75%	96%	+21%
2. Did you know your goals? Do you understand your goals?	75%	96%	+21%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How were your goals set? (Your decision [Yes] Assigned by a supervisor [No]) 	21%	92%	+71%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did you have a voice during your conversation? 	42%	100%	+58%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were your goals challenging? 	50%	88%	+38%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did you have the needed resources in the past to meet your goals? 	33%	92%	+59%
3. Did you receive ongoing feedback about your performance in the past?	50%	100%	+50%

Do you know how your supervisor will provide feedback to you about your goals?			
4. Tell me about your relationship with your supervisor in the past (Positive [Yes]) Describe your relationship with your supervisor negative (Positive [Yes])	38%	75%	+38%
5. Did you have team goals in the past?	54%	100%	+46%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could you impact how your team performed towards those goals? • Do you feel like you could impact your team's performance? 	50%	92%	+42%
6. Have you had an opportunity to share where you wanted to develop yourself professionally in the past? Did you have an opportunity to share how you wanted to develop professionally?	42%	100%	+58%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you get training for those opportunities? [how you wanted to develop yourself] • Did you schedule/agree on the training/support to prepare for your next professional opportunity? 	21%	83%	+62%
7. Did you understand the organization's mission and/or vision of the past? Do you understand the organization's mission?	33%	100%	+67%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you believe in it [the mission or vision of that organization]? ([No] if they did not know it) 	46%	100%	+54%

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you believe in the mission of the organization? 			
8. Did you feel like you belonged to that organization? Are you engaged in your work for the organization?	42%	100%	+58%
9. Where you engaged in your goals? Do you feel engaged in your goals?	50%	100%	+50%

* The post-interview did not ask participants if they had team goals, but each team in the organization did have team goals. I assume those goals were assigned to individual employees.

Appendix 3: Project Timeline

Project Stage	Time of Performance
Pre-Stage. Developed initial goal setting process	October 2014 - June 2015
Stage 1. Research interest identified	May 2015
Stage 2. Topic refined and developed	June - July 2015
Stage 3. Research Plan and Thesis Proposal	June - August 2015
Stage 4. Ethical approval	August 2015
Stage 5. Literature review	September 2015 - January 2016
Stage 6. Participation recruitment	October 2016
Stage 7. Data/interviews/action learning	December 2016 - March 2017
Assessment of goal setting process	November - December 2016
Goal setting process redesign	December 2016 - January 2017
Pre-interviews	December 2016
Goal setting sessions	February 2017
Post interviews	February - March 2017
Stage 8. Data interpretation	April - July 2017
Stage 9. Thesis write-up	July 2017 - July 2018
Stage 10. Thesis submission	July 2018
Stage 11. Thesis resubmission	November 2018

Appendix 4: Redesigned Conversations Sheets and Roadmaps

Withdrawn for publication